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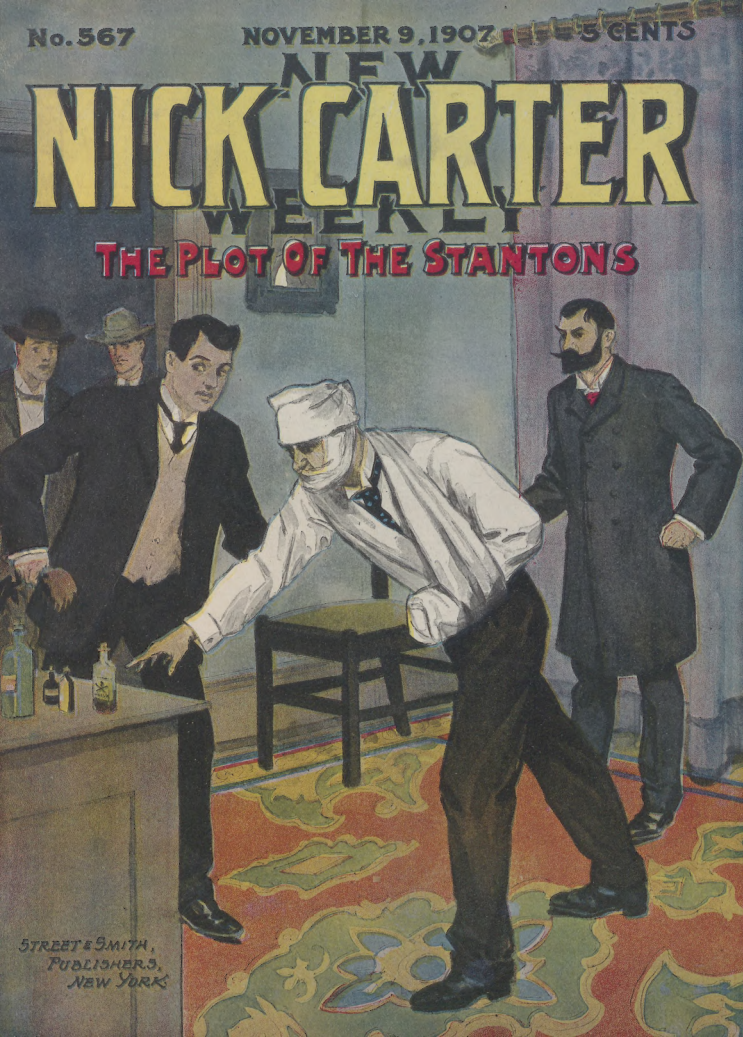
NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

THE PLOT OF THE STANTONS



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NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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The Plot of the Stantons;

OR,

NICK CARTER PREVENTS THE THEFT OF A FORTUNE.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE BEGINNING OF A MYSTERY.

Joseph tapped at the door of his master's study and entered.

"Mr. Carter," he said, "Morris, the valet of Mr. Roger Sturtevant, who was killed, is down-stairs in the hall and is very anxious to see you. He says it is important."

The detective laid aside the book he had been reading and looked up smilingly.

"Morris?" he repeated inquiringly; "I shall be very glad to see him. You may send him right up here, Joseph;" and a few moments later Morris entered the room briskly and paused just inside the door, where he remained in a respectful attitude while he waited for the detective to address him.

"Come in, Morris," said Nick. "I am very glad to see you. You may take that chair over by the window. I suppose you have come to tell me how things are progressing at the Larches since the incumbency of your new master, Mr. Robert Sturtevant."

"Yes, sir; it's just that exactly."

"You don't mean to say, Morris, as your tone implies, that there is more trouble?"

"I am afraid there is, sir."

"Well, well, tell me all about it. I am getting quite accustomed to mysteries associated with the Sturtevant family. What has happened now?"

"Well, Mr. Carter, I don't really know that anything has happened, and yet I greatly fear that something is going on that demands investigation."

"Tell me about it, Morris," said the detective indulgently.

"Will you pardon me, sir, if I go back quite a little way before I get down to the present story I have to relate?"

"Certainly. Tell me what you have to say in your own way."

"You will remember, of course, sir, our experiences with the secrets of the haunted house,* and you know how much the young man, Stanton, and his father had to do with that affair. I mention them now, sir, because, if my suspicions are correct in the present matter that I have to relate, it would be my idea that the Stantons are responsible for it."

"Indeed?" said the detective; "that is harking back quite a way."

*See NICK CARTER WEEKLY, No. 565, "Secrets of a Haunted House."

"You must remember, sir, that, although I was nothing more than Mr. Roger Sturtevant's valet, I was very greatly in his confidence always. He trusted me implicitly in more ways than one, and, aside from our relations as master and servant, I was very fond of him."

"Yes, Morris, I know all about that."

"You also know that when he was murdered and his body stolen, and when, subsequent to that, his cousin, Robert Sturtevant, appeared upon the scene and came into all the property that was left,* he wished me to remain with him in the same capacity that I served his predecessor. You will remember, Mr. Carter, that I was very reluctant to do so, but was finally persuaded, and during the three months that have passed since that time I have devoted myself to Robert Sturtevant as sincerely as I ever did to Roger."

"I have no doubt of it, Morris."

"I am free to say, sir, that I have become, or, perhaps, had become, almost as fond of him as I was of my former master. I was not with him long before I was convinced that he is a young man of sterling character, and in every way as lovable and as honorable as the master whom I had served with so much affection."

"Well, Morris, hadn't you better get down to facts?"

"I am coming to them, sir, but I am very anxious that you should understand thoroughly my position in this present matter. I want you to know that in spirit at least I am as devoted to the interests of Robert Sturtevant as I ever was to those of Roger, his cousin.

"It was Mr. Robert's desire that we should remain at the Larches, as you know. Mr. Roger had never remained there at all, save at rare intervals. He always used it as a place for infrequent entertainments instead of a home, and his only periods of remaining there were comprehended in week-end parties, but when Mr. Robert took possession of the property, he closed up the haunted house, at the upper end of Manhattan Island, and advertised it for sale, reciting in the advertisement all of its strange history, in order that the purchaser might not be deceived in what he was getting, and then he announced his intention of making the Larches his permanent home."

"Well?" said Nick, with a little show of impatience.

"I think it was about a month, sir, after we were thoroughly established at the Larches, when young Mr. Stanton drove up to the mansion one day in his automobile and sent his card to Mr. Robert Sturtevant. I was attending him at the time, and received the card to deliver to my present master, and in doing so I considered it incumbent upon me to relate to him then and there as much as I could, in the short time that was allowed me, of the history of Stanton and his associates in connection with our experiences at the haunted house."

"Had he never heard the story before, Morris?"

"He had heard parts of it, sir, but never in detail. I will confess that I was surprised and rather troubled by the visit of young Stanton, whom I knew to be still under indictment for the conspiracy in connection with that other affair, and that he was at liberty only on bail. I could not guess why he should seek out Robert Sturtevant, and it did not occur to me at all until I saw the two men together very soon after that; but, as I say, I believed it my duty to relate in detail to Mr. Robert the history of that former experience, and, while he sent the footman below to inform Mr. Sturtevant that he would see him presently, he listened with patience to my story."

"I suppose," said Nick, smiling, "that you embellished that story properly, Morris, and that you added something of your own fears of the moment to it."

"I had no 'fears of the moment,' as you express it, Mr. Carter; but I did have misgivings. I felt that the call of Mr. Stanton at the house, and his efforts to make the acquaintance of Robert Sturtevant, boded no good, and could portend nothing but evil, although I was utterly incapable of even venturing to guess what form of expression that evil might take."

"Tell me what you told Robert about it."

"I told him, sir, the story of the conspiracy in connection with the haunted house from the beginning to the end of it, in as few words and as concisely as I could do so; and I warned him against putting any trust or confidence in Stanton, and even went so far as to ask him to change his mind and not to see Stanton at all.

"He laughed my forebodings aside, however, for he is a man who is incapable of fear himself, as you know—and presently descended the stairs to receive his guest."

"Well?" said Nick.

"They talked together in the library, and were there almost an hour when Mr. Robert rang for me. It was when I entered the library in response to that summons that I saw the two men together, and was startled by the resemblance between them."

"What!" exclaimed Nick. "I know them both, Morris, and I have never noticed any resemblance between them."

"No, sir, I don't suppose you have. It is not the kind of resemblance one would notice at all or that would be suggested to one unless they are seen together, side by side or face to face. It is not a resemblance of features so much as it is one of method; there is a decided similarity in their voices and in their gestures; in their manner of carrying their heads, and in every motion of their bodies. They are of the same height and very much of the same physique, and, while they could not be said to look alike, they are alike, if you will understand the apparent paradox."

*See NICK CARTER WEEKLY, No. 566, "A Mystery In India Ink."

"I think I know what you mean, Morris, but I fear that your imagination has played tricks with you."

"Not at all, sir. It was not my imagination, for I was not expecting anything of the kind at all. I remember Mr. Stanton quite as well as you, sir, I think, and I have been associated with Mr. Robert Sturtevant for some time. It had never occurred to me until that moment that the two men were at all alike; but at the instant that I entered the room where they were seated together, the likeness between them which is not a resemblance, or, if you choose to turn it about, a resemblance between them which is not a likeness, impressed me so forcibly that I was not able to dismiss it from my mind; and now, sir, in the light of events that have happened since that time, the recollection of that moment has made a still deeper impression upon me."

"Did Stanton recognize you and speak to you when you entered the room?"

"Yes, sir, at once; and I ran the risk of the disapproval of my master by my conduct at that time."

The detective chuckled softly.

"I am afraid, Morris, that you are a very obstinate young man. Tell me about it."

"When I entered the room, young Stanton, perceiving me, stopped speaking and for an instant there was an expression of utter dismay upon his countenance, for I do not think he expected to see me there. It was only the expression of an instant, however, for it disappeared at once; and he smiled with that bland air that he knows so well how to assume, as he exclaimed:

"Why, Morris, how do you do? I had no idea of finding you here. I would like to shake hands with you, Morris, in recollection of old times,' and he actually stuck out his hand toward me, a servant."

"Well?" said Nick, again chuckling softly.

"'If you will excuse me, sir,' I replied to him, 'I would very much prefer not to shake hands with you'; and then I turned and faced my master, and added: 'I think you rang for me, sir.'"

The detective laughed outright now as he inquired:

"What did Robert say to that?"

"I think, sir, that he did not know whether to be angry or to laugh, and I don't know what he might have said had not Stanton relieved the situation by turning to him and saying coolly:

"'You must not chide Morris for his conduct toward me, Sturtevant; he has an old grudge against me, and he believes, with good reason. No doubt you have heard the story.' 'Yes,' my master replied to him, 'I have heard the story.' He turned again to me, then, and added that he wanted me to fetch his duster and cap and glasses, as he was going in the automobile with Mr. Stanton.

"They drove away together in Stanton's automobile within a quarter of an hour after that time, and, Mr. Carter, from that moment to this one, nothing has been the same at the Larches!"

CHAPTER II.

THE MAN IN THE DARKENED ROOM.

"Wait a moment," said the detective, "before we go into the changes that have occurred since that time, and which you are about to describe to me. I wish you to answer a few questions relative to that particular meeting."

"Yes, sir," replied Morris.

"Do you know or did you ascertain the object of Stanton's call at that time?"

"No, sir. I had no idea about it."

"Mr. Sturtevant did not tell you about it?"

"No, sir. He had no opportunity to do so."

"I mean afterward."

"I repeat, Mr. Carter, that he had no opportunity to do so."

"Morris, you do not understand me. I mean after he returned from the ride did he not tell you the object of Mr. Stanton's call, and why he had gone away with him in the automobile?"

"No, sir; there was no opportunity for him to do so."

"Not after he returned?"

"No, sir."

"Why not?"

"I have already told you, Mr. Carter, that nothing was the same after he started away on that ride. When he returned he was brought back in a carriage by a man who said he was Mr. Stanton's chauffeur. There had been an accident, at least that is what the chauffeur said, and both Mr. Sturtevant and Mr. Stanton had been severely injured."

"I am beginning to understand you, now," said the detective. "You mean that after they left the house together in the automobile they met with an accident, in which both men were injured, and that Mr. Sturtevant was brought back to the Larches by the chauffeur?"

"Yes, sir."

"How badly was he hurt, Morris?"

"Well, sir, that is a difficult question to answer. I don't know how to reply to it. My first impression at the time was that he was very badly hurt indeed, although he could walk and use his arms as well as ever; but his face was bandaged and plastered so that it was almost invisible to the eye, and I was told that that was practically the only injury he had sustained. A doctor came with him whom I have never seen before, and that

physician has remained in charge ever since. The doctor's name is Rudini."

"And how long ago was that, you say, Morris?"

"It will be four weeks to-morrow, sir."

"What is the condition of your master now?"

"Very much the same as it was when he was brought home the day of the accident."

"Do you mean that you have never seen him or spoken to him since that time?"

"I have seen him frequently, sir, if that term can be applied to a meeting in a room that is darkened so that objects are scarcely discernible across it. I have talked with him, if you can apply that term to conversations that are only one-sided, and in which he has indulged by giving only monosyllabic replies, and those in a tone of voice so entirely muffled by bandages as to be unrecognizable as the voice of any person in particular."

"What is the explanation of all this, Morris? I mean, what explanation does the physician make of it."

"Well, sir, the gist of it all is this, as nearly as I can make it out: According to Doctor Rudini, Mr. Sturtevant was thrown from the car so that he alighted on his face in a graveled roadway, with the result that his features were terribly lacerated, and the skin was almost entirely torn away. His eyes were injured and his lips were cut, and altogether I expect that he will hardly be recognized as the same man when he comes out again—if he ever does."

"Has there ever been any doubt of his ultimate recovery?"

"Apparently not; at least the doctor has not seemed to entertain any."

"Now explain to me, if you please, what you meant by the statement that nothing had been the same at the Larches since that night."

"I meant just what I said, sir. Nothing has been the same. Mr. Robert Sturtevant, when he started on that ride, was a handsome man, full of life and laughter, and fond of his jokes. When he was brought back to the house a few hours later, by Mr. Stanton's chauffeur, he was carried to that darkened room with his face bandaged, and he has never been outside of it since; and neither has any one been permitted to enter that room and wait upon him, save the two trained nurses engaged by Doctor Rudini, and, of course, the doctor himself.

"I, who had always been his trusted servant during the short time I had served him before the accident, am practically expelled from the room, and only permitted to enter it at infrequent intervals, and then only for a short time. At such times Mr. Sturtevant speaks to me only in monosyllables, and seems to take little or no interest in anything at all. From being his valet and attending to his wants from the moment he arose in the morning until he retired again, I have become but a guest in that house, for I have nothing—absolutely nothing—to do."

"But why are you here, Morris? What brought you here to see me?"

"I came, Mr. Carter, because I am greatly troubled. I came because I want you to go to the Larches and try to see Mr. Robert Sturtevant yourself, if you will."

"But why, Morris? Why go to see him? He has not sent for me?"

"No, sir. He has not sent for you; he doesn't even know that I have come to you to-day; but I wish you would go to see him."

"Why?"

"To set my misgivings at rest, if nothing else."

"What are your misgivings, Morris?"

"I scarcely know how to explain them, sir. They are so many and seem to be so entirely without foundation; at least, with none that is logical."

"Tell me what they are. Tell me what you fear."

"I fear—I cannot help fearing—that all of this business that has resulted from a seeming accident, or a real one, has been the deliberate work of young Stanton. I cannot overcome the suspicion that Mr. Robert Sturtevant is not himself, and, aside from being severely injured about the head and face, that there is some underhand work going on against him."

"I must ask you to be even more explicit than that, Morris."

"Well, sir, in a word, I believe—I am convinced in my own mind of one of two things. Either he is drugged, and is kept constantly under the effects of it, or his head is injured so that he is not the same man that he was before."

"Have you any reasons for entertaining these suspicions other than those you have told me, Morris?"

"No, sir; but those have grown with each visit I have made to the room of my master. It does not seem rational to me that he should be confined so long in a darkened room because of the injuries he is said to have sustained. It does not seem reasonable that he should have consented to keep me, his valet, from his

presence, and to bar me from his room, as has been done, unless he is acting under some sort of coercion. In short, I believe, Mr. Carter, that there is another plot here, somewhere, and this time I believe that it is Robert Sturtevant who is the victim of it."

"I am afraid, Morris, that your imagination has been playing tricks with you."

"That is very possible, Mr. Carter, and it is because I have feared as much that I have refrained so long from coming to you."

"Have you made any inquiries about the accident itself, Morris?"

"Yes, sir."

"What do you know about that?"

"I know very little. I know that it did happen. I know that both men were injured. Stanton is at his own home now, and is also in seclusion. I have made inquiries about him, but all that I can find out is that he is doing well, but will not be out for some time."

"You are sure that there was an accident, are you, Morris?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was the machine wrecked?"

"I don't think so. It was merely put out of commission for the time being."

"What sort of an accident was it, Morris?"

"A loss of the control of the steering-wheel, and collision with a telegraph-pole at the side of the road."

"Out in the country, Morris?"

"Yes, sir; within three miles of the Larches."

"Was any one in the automobile with the two men at the time?"

"Only the chauffeur, sir."

"The same chauffeur who afterward brought Mr. Sturtevant home?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did he then, or has he at all, explained the accident to you?"

"No, sir. I didn't think to ask about it at the time particularly, and I have not seen him again since then."

"What did you understand Mr. Stanton's injuries to be?"

"I have not been able to find out, sir; I can only guess."

"And what do you guess about it?"

"To put it plainly, Mr. Carter, I don't know what to guess or what to attempt to think about it. It may be that I am entirely in the wrong, and that I am creating a mare's nest out of my own imagination. It may be that I am making a mountain out of a mole-hill, and digging up a conspiracy where none exists; but I will say this, and say it emphatically, that if the injured man with the bandaged face now at the Larches is Mr. Robert Sturtevant, he is either kept constantly under the influence of drugs, so that he has barely sufficient faculty to answer questions when they are addressed to him, or his head has been injured so severely that his mind has become unsettled. I have twice implored Doctor Rudini to permit me to call in the physician who used to attend Mr. Roger Sturtevant, for a consultation with him, but he has refused, and I think the time has come, sir, when some one who stands in the capacity of a friend, and that some one who has the authority and the power to interfere, should investigate this business in behalf of Robert Sturtevant."

"You just now used a strange expression, Morris—one that I will repeat in part, for I would like to have you explain it. You said: 'If that man with the injured face is Robert Sturtevant——' What did you mean by that?"

"I am afraid, sir, that if I answer that question and tell you what I really did mean, that you will certainly think that my imagination has got the best of me."

"Imagination, Morris, is sometimes of great benefit to us. Tell me what you mean."

"I mean, Mr. Carter," and Morris bent forward toward the detective with a very earnest air while he was speaking, "that there may have been a substitution of persons in this matter. I mean that the wounded man up-stairs at the Larches, who is so thoroughly guarded by a doctor and two nurses, may not be Mr. Robert Sturtevant at all, but another who has been substituted in his place!"

CHAPTER III.

THE TWO RUDINIS.

"Who is this Doctor Rudini, Morris?" asked the detective, after a moment's pause.

"I do not know, sir."

"Have you ever heard of him before this particular occasion?"

"No, sir."

"Are you sure that you have not heard Mr. Robert Sturtevant mention him at all?"

"I am positive that I have not."

"Does he represent himself as ever having been the physician for Mr. Sturtevant before this time?"

"I don't remember that he has made any representations about it."

"Did you say that he returned in the carriage with Mr. Sturtevant and the chauffeur when the wounded man was taken home?"

"Yes."

"And when were the nurses summoned?"

"They were summoned by telephone within an hour after the arrival of the party at the house."

"Doctor Rudini must have an office somewhere, Morris. Where is it?"

"If he has one, sir, I don't know about it."

"Do you mean that he remains at the Larches all the time?"

"He has not left the house since he entered it with Mr. Sturtevant, save, of course, to take a little exercise on the piazza, or something of that kind. I mean that he has not been away from it."

"Is he a man who appears to know his business?"

"I should think so—yes, sir."

"Describe him to me."

"He is a tall, slender man, rather elegant in his attire, and looks like a Frenchman or an Italian—the latter, I should say, from his name."

"Does he speak with an accent?"

"Not at all. When he speaks it is as correctly as any one does."

"Do you think that Mr. Sturtevant is thoroughly satisfied with his physician?"

"I don't know anything about it, sir, and that is one of the points I have made. Twice, when I have visited the rooms wherein he is confined, I have attempted to ask him if he would not like me to call another physician or surgeon in consultation, but each time my question has been interrupted or interfered with, and, at least, I have received no satisfactory reply to it."

"And the nurses, Morris; what about them?"

"They are men of the same nationality as the doctor, whatever that may be."

"Do they seem competent?"

"As far as I am capable of judging, and with what opportunity I have had of doing so, I suppose they are competent."

"Do they speak English?"

"When they speak at all, they do, but I haven't heard either of them utter half a dozen words of any kind since they have been in the house."

"Have you made any effort to question them, or either of them?"

"Yes. Frequently."

"And with no satisfaction?"

"None whatever."

"How do they avoid your questions?"

"One of them told me bluntly that he never talked about patients he was attending, and that if I wanted any information I must apply to the doctor. The other one has refused to reply to me at all."

"I think, Morris, that I must repeat the statement that I made a little while ago, to the effect that you have permitted your imagination to get the best of you, but, still, I have so much faith in your judgment and in your loyalty and sincerity, that I'll think the matter over, and will try to visit the Larches late this afternoon or some time during the day to-morrow—and that reminds me: do you think that Rudini would permit me to see Mr. Sturtevant?"

"I don't know, sir. He doesn't permit any one to enter the room at all, save the two nurses and myself at the very infrequent intervals I have mentioned. When I am permitted to go to the room, I am cautioned to say as little as possible; to ask no questions, and to remain only a moment or two, and when I enter the room on such occasions, it is always darkened, so that I can only discern the outlines of Mr. Sturtevant's figure, and altogether the visits are as unsatisfactory as they could be made to be."

When the detective was alone and could think calmly over what had been told to him, he found that he placed very little importance upon the suspicions that the valet entertained, and yet there was enough to coincide, and enough of mystery about the occurrence that Morris had described to make him decide that it would be as well to investigate at least a little way into the history that surrounded the incident of the accident.

It was quite proper that he, as a friend of Robert Sturtevant, should call upon him to inquire after his health since the accident, and, if the truth be told, the detective regarded the fact that he had not been informed of the accident as rather significant, and as upholding, possibly, the suspicions that were entertained by Morris.

Nick had no doubt that Robert Sturtevant would have

sent for him, or at least would have notified him of his condition, had he been able to do so; and the fact that he had not rather justified Morris in the idea that the injury had so affected Sturtevant's head that he was not entirely himself, or that it was so severe that it had been necessary to administer anesthetics to him constantly.

At all events, the detective determined that he would call there as soon as possible, but first, inasmuch as whenever he did anything it was his habit to do it thoroughly, he determined to make some inquiries concerning the condition of Stanton, and also about the identification and the standing of this Doctor Rudini, who found it possible to forego all his regular practise in order to attend constantly upon one patient.

The more Nick thought over the circumstances that surrounded the case, as presented to him by Morris, the more logical it seemed that there might be some foundation for the valet's suspicions.

On the surface, and to a casual observer, these things would, perhaps, have made no impression, but viewed systematically and chronologically, it did seem to the detective that there were certain features about the case which required explanation.

He left the house soon after Morris's departure, and had himself driven to the house where he had been told Stanton was confined as the result of his injuries, and upon applying at the door and inquiring for young Stanton, he was informed that the gentleman was ill and could not be seen. It was a maid servant of the household who came to the door in answer to his ring, she evidently having responded to it during the momentary absence of the butler or the footman from his post, and Nick said to her:

"I am an old acquaintance of Mr. Stanton's, and I wish very much to see him. I was not aware until a very short time ago that he was ill; will you tell me what is the matter?"

"He met with an accident, sir," responded the maid; "he was thrown from an automobile."

"Ah, indeed; and was he badly hurt?"

"His face was injured, sir."

"Is that all? Were no bones broken?"

"I cannot say as to that, sir. I only know that we have been told that his face was badly cut, and that a doctor has been in constant attendance upon him since the injury."

"Is the doctor in the house now?" asked Nick.

"No, sir. He went out just a few moments ago to take a walk. He does so twice every day, but he is never gone more than half an hour at a time."

"What is the physician's name?" asked Nick.

"He is Doctor Rudini, sir."

"Rudini!" exclaimed Nick; "I thought—that is, I believed—that Doctor Rudini was in attendance upon another patient just at this time."

"I know nothing as to that, sir," responded the maid servant, "only that the doctor who is attending Mr. Stanton is named Rudini."

"Can you tell me where he has his office?"

"No, sir; I do not know."

"I suppose there are also nurses in attendance upon Mr. Stanton, are there not?"

"Yes, sir, two men, who take turns in caring for him. One of them is sleeping now, and the other one is with him."

"Would you be so good," asked Nick, "as to call the nurses, or one of the nurses, to the door for me?"

"It would be against my orders to do so, sir. I am forbidden to go into the room where Mr. Stanton is confined, and I am also ordered to take no messages to either of the nurses without the consent of the doctor."

The detective shrugged his shoulders and turned away from the door, and as he did so the maid stepped outside after him; then her face brightened, and she pointed up the street toward the avenue, saying as she did so:

"The doctor is returning now, sir."

Nick could see approaching them a man who answered very well to the description that Morris had given of the physician who was in constant attendance upon Roger Sturtevant, and who, according to the valet, had not left the Larches at all since the happening of the accident. It was utterly impossible that one man could be in two places at one time, or that one man could have traveled from one house to the other intermittently without the knowledge of the servants in those houses. If Rudini, the man who was attending Stanton, and Rudini, the man who was reported to be in attendance upon Sturtevant, were the same, Morris would have known of his frequent absences from the Larches, and this maid servant would not have reported that his journeys from the house never consumed more than a half-hour at a time.

The detective dimissed the maid by telling her that he would wait on the steps for the arrival of the doctor, and as he did so, he noticed that the approaching physi-

cian was regarding him with furtive interest and apparently with some disfavor.

"Good morning, doctor," said the detective, as the latter ascended the steps toward the front door, "I was calling to see your patient, and was about taking my leave, when the maid identified you for me. Would it be possible for me to see Mr. Stanton?"

"Quite impossible, sir," was the uncompromising reply; and the doctor would have passed into the house without more words had not the detective occupied such a position that it was impracticable for him to do so.

"May I inquire as to the condition of Mr. Stanton?" pursued Nick smilingly, and assuming the air of careless interest that a mere acquaintance or indifferent friend might have adopted.

"I may say," replied the doctor slowly, "that Mr. Stanton is improving. His condition is better each day."

"Thank you," said Nick; "and when do you expect him to be able to be about again?"

"That is impossible for me to determine just at present, sir, but it will be two or three weeks more at least."

"Was the accident so severe?"

"The injury was very serious."

"To his face almost entirely, I am told."

"Yes; to his face and hands, and also his back."

"Indeed," said Nick. "I am an old acquaintance of Mr. Stanton's, doctor; I would be very glad if you would give me some of the details of the injuries."

"I don't suppose," replied the doctor with a palpable sneer, "that you require a technical description of the case, do you, or a history of it?"

"No, indeed," laughed Nick, purposely overlooking the sneer, "but I would like to know what happened to him."

"Well, sir, he was thrown from his automobile. He was driving with a friend, a Mr. Sturtevant, who lives out of town at a place called the Larches. They were thrown out at the same time, and each received practically the same injuries. They alighted on their faces on the roadway, with the result that their features were badly lacerated and that the gravel was ground into their flesh, thus causing wounds that were not only exceedingly painful, but very slow to heal. Mr. Stanton was the more severely injured of the two, in that his hands were also badly hurt, and also that some portion of the wreckage of the machine injured his back. Since the accident he has been under my constant care, and I can assure you he is doing as well as any patient could do under the circumstances."

"Thank you," said Nick. "That is very explicit. May I ask also for the condition of his friend, Mr. Sturtevant, who was hurt at the same time?"

"Mr. Sturtevant is also getting along as well as could be expected," replied the doctor. "He is under the care of my brother."

"Ah!" said Nick. "I had heard that a Doctor Rudini was attending him, and the maid just now said that a Doctor Rudini was attending Mr. Stanton. It was logical to suppose that it was the same man."

"No, sir, it is my brother who attends Mr. Sturtevant," replied the doctor, who now discovered an opening by which he could pass into the doorway, and with a curt "Good morning, sir," he stepped inside and closed the door after him.

For a moment the detective lingered on the steps, and then, when he went slowly down them at last, and turned toward the avenue, he remarked in a low tone to himself:

"I think, after all, that Morris has very good grounds for his suspicions."

CHAPTER IV.

NICK CARTER UNVEILS A FRAUD.

There is an establishment in one of the cross-streets in the city of New York that has been widely advertised throughout the country as employing surgeons, who find it not only possible but profitable to make such alterations in the features and facial contour of people who apply to them as to render the ugly handsome and to change the commonplace into the beautiful; and there is no doubt that this school of surgery has performed many astonishing miracles in the way of straightening noses and otherwise re-forming features that have gone astray in their growth, just as a vine or a tree may grow when it bears some unnatural burden.

The head of this particular institution was well known to the detective, but it is doubtful if Nick would have thought of him in connection with this case but for the fact that from a bill-board across the street, as he passed the corner nearest to Stanton's house, he saw, staring at him the advertisement of the institute in question.

As he read the words which were intended to make the advertisement attractive, he recalled certain remarks that had just been made to him by Dr. Rudini, which had

more or less significance according to their application, from the detective's standpoint.

The coincidence by which both men in that automobile accident had suffered laceration of their faces struck him as being somewhat remarkable; but not so much so as the additional information just gleaned that Stanton's hands were injured, and that his back had been wounded or wrenched in some manner that had not been explained.

Nick recalled the fact at that moment that the little finger of Robert Sturtevant's left hand was missing, and that the middle finger of his right hand terminated at the first joint, the end of it having been bitten off by a bullet in some youthful scrape in which Sturtevant had been involved. He recalled also that Robert Sturtevant wore certain tattooed marks on his back, and these facts, taken in connection with the suspicions suggested by Morris, created another coincidence which he believed to be worthy of consideration.

It was because of this and of the further doubts that had entered his mind, because of the conversation with the maid and the doctor, that he had himself taken to the institution already mentioned, where he sent his card to the proprietor, requesting a personal interview.

Their acquaintance was such that this was granted with very little delay, and as soon as they were alone together the detective said to his friend:

"Doctor, I have a case on hand which came to me this morning, which involves, if my theories about it are at all correct, some practise of the science you advertise, and I want to obtain from you, if possible, some lay information regarding it."

"I will be glad to give you any assistance in my power," was the quick reply.

"Then, to begin with, I want to ask you this question: Suppose there are two men who are more or less alike in their appearance in existence. Suppose, nevertheless, that those two men are not sufficiently alike so that it would be possible for one to be mistaken for the other; suppose, again, that these two men should apply to you and should ask you to operate on their features so that they might be transformed each into a representation of the other. Would it be possible under any circumstances to perform such an operation, or such operations, rather successfully?"

"If it is a problem you are giving me," replied the doctor slowly, "I would answer without hesitation: Now, it would be impossible. But I can imagine circumstances where such a thing could be done with a considerable degree of success."

"Would you mind telling me, doctor, how such circumstances might exist? I confess, I am very much interested."

"Well," the doctor spoke slowly, "I don't think it would be possible to make over features and facial expressions with sufficient skill to reproduce the likeness of one face in the features of another one; but I could reproduce the contour of that face almost exactly."

"You mean, I suppose," said the detective, "that the expression of the face would elude you."

"Yes; there is nothing in my science that could reproduce in one face the expression in the features of another one."

"But you could reproduce the facial contour?"

"Under the right conditions, I could do that almost exactly."

"For instance," said Nick, "take your face and my own. Do you mean that it would be possible for you to make my features over so that they would look like yours, or to make yours over so they would look like mine?"

"No, Carter, I do not mean that at all. What I do mean is this: I could go out upon the street and select a man somewhere who possessed what I would call a good face for an operation. By searching still further, I could find another man who was suffering like the first one, so that I could operate upon the two, and finish by rendering them almost alike; but if I did that, while the two men would look very much alike when I had finished, neither of them would at all resemble the man he himself had been before, and I would not have succeeded in creating any original expression of either of them."

"I think I understand you," said the detective; "but I will put the case to you that I have in mind, and I will ask you if it would be possible for your science to carry out the idea that my suspicions have aroused this morning."

"Very well."

"Two men, who are strikingly alike in physique and weight, meet with an accident while riding in an automobile; both men are thrown out; both grind their faces in the gravel of the roadway, so that they are torn and disfigured and badly lacerated. One of them receives still further injuries, to which I may refer later. Now, doctor, under those circumstances, and surrounded by those conditions, would it be possible for you, if both

men were brought to this institution, to substitute one man for the other by operating according to your methods?"

The doctor shrugged his shoulders and replied:

"Oh, yes, I think so, under those circumstances; only if I were to do it or attempt to do it, I would much prefer that there had been no serious laceration of features before I operated."

"Ah," said Nick, smiling, "we are getting at it now. The mere report of such extended injuries would make your job easier, wouldn't it?"

"Decidedly so, Carter. I wouldn't have so much to accomplish, for you must see that any failure to bring about exactly the desired end could be accounted for as being due to the effects of the accident."

"Exactly."

"For example, Carter, I will go still further. We will return for the moment to the example I just drew for you."

"Yes," said Nick.

"Take the two men I mentioned as going out on the street to find in order to operate upon them. If those two men were well known; if I desired to put one in the place of the other, I would be greatly aided in my efforts if I could let it become generally known that the man for which I wished to substitute another had been badly injured about the face. You can see that any shortcoming of mine in creating the likeness could be easily accounted for in that way. I mean, to put it more plainly, that if I failed to reproduce the likeness of the other man with sufficient exactitude to satisfy everybody, the points where I failed could be made good by referring to the terrible accident, etc., etc."

"Exactly," said Nick; "and now, doctor, that is just about what I think has occurred in a case that I am engaged upon at this moment, and I want to ask you if you happen to know of any others in your branch of science in the city of New York who are sufficiently expert in that form of surgery to undertake just such a case as I have described?"

"No, I do not," replied the doctor. "In fact, Carter, I don't know of any one in this country who could do it outside of my establishment, and I have only one assistant whom I think would be capable of it."

"Do you know of any such person, or of more than one, in any other country who would be capable of it?"

"Yes," was the reply.

"Who?"

"Well, there are the Rudini brothers, in Paris."

"I think, doctor," said Nick, "that we are getting warm. Are there two of those Rudinis, or more?"

"There are five of them. They are the most expert at their business in the world, I think, and I do not except myself. They have a large establishment in Paris, and receive enormous fees for their services."

"Do you happen to know any of those five brothers personally?" asked the detective.

"No; I have seen their work."

"Do you know any of them by sight?"

"No."

"Do you think, doctor, that two of those Rudinis might be prevailed upon for a fee to come to this country to practise their surgery upon given subjects, such as I have described?"

"I have no doubt of it, if the fee were large enough."

"Even if they had knowledge of the fraud that was intended?"

"I think that also would depend upon the size of the fee."

"Well," said Nick, rising, "I can tell you this: Two of those Rudinis are here in this country at the present time. There are two patients who have been provided for them precisely in the manner I have described in relating the automobile accident; one of these patients is in charge of one of the Rudinis, while the other is caring for the second one, and now, since this conversation I have had with you, there is no doubt in my mind whatever that one man is being substituted for another, in order that a large fortune may be obtained in that manner."

"But would not that require the consent of both parties to the operation?" asked the doctor.

"I don't see why," said Nick. "Surgeons who can operate so expertly as you describe—as these Rudinis may be able to do it, for instance—would not hesitate to go still further with one of their victims, and render him an imbecile, or next to one, for the remainder of his life.

"I may as well use names to you, doctor. I am referring to a man named Sturtevant, who is the victim, and another man named Stanton, who is to be the thief. It is my opinion that at this moment Stanton is in the house and lying upon the bed of Robert Sturtevant, cut at a place called the Larches, and that presently, if he is not interfered with, he will recover and show himself to the world as Sturtevant, and if there has been any mis-

take in the making over of his features and his facial expression, it will be attributed to the fearful automobile accident through which he has just passed with such a narrow escape from death. I am also of the opinion that at Stanton's house, and lying upon his bed at this moment, is Robert Sturtevant in person, subjected daily to the tortures of the other Rudini, who is not only despoiling his features of all resemblance to his former self, but is perhaps at the same time creating an artificial clot upon the brain, which will steal away the memory, or at least render him incapable of denying the right of Stanton to pose as Sturtevant.

"And that, doctor, is a correct statement, I think, of the case in which I am at present interested."

CHAPTER V.

THE MIXING OF TWO MEN.

The man of science with whom the detective had been talking strode up and down his office in silence for several moments, while he thought deeply upon the case that Nick Carter had presented to him. Presently he said:

"Carter, of course I don't know just how far this matter that you here described to me has progressed, and it is always possible that you may be entirely mistaken in your surmises; however, if it is true that two of the Rudinis from Paris are in this country, and now one of them is at the house of Sturtevant while the other one is at Stanton's, there is no doubt that some devilry of the kind you have described is afoot.

"What I want to say to you—the thing that I want to impress upon you—is this: That the genius of the Rudini brothers in this branch of science so far exceeds anything that I could perform myself, that I may be said to practise only the rudiments of the art. It is possible that they might find it comparatively easy to accomplish what I have said it is impossible to do. It is certain that their presence here in those two houses, caring for those two men, is so significant that I think that we may venture to conclude that your theory of the case is correct.

"And now, Carter, if we start on that premise, if we admit that you are right in your conclusions, it will be well if we consider, before you take another step, just what you have to contend with and what you will have to face."

"I think so, too," said the detective.

"We must remember, then, that it was four weeks ago when this accident was supposed to have happened, for we must conclude that the accident was a fake."

"Yes," said Nick, "there is no doubt about that."

"The man who was intended to be operated upon—that is, Sturtevant—was first taken to some place where he was imprisoned by Stanton, and after that the chauffeur managed to wreck the machine, and to give out the report that the two men had been injured.

"Of course," pursued the doctor, "the accident was a fake. The first move on the part of the conspirators was to get Sturtevant entirely in their power, where they could operate on him at their leisure."

"I wish, doctor," said the detective, "that you would describe to me, if you can, something about how they would go to work to obtain the results they seek in this matter."

"I could only tell you how I would do it myself were I working under those conditions," replied the doctor.

"That is exactly what I wish you to do."

"We will begin, then," said the doctor, "with the supposition that you are Stanton, and that you have brought here with you to-day the man Sturtevant."

"Yes."

"Sturtevant, we will say, is lying on that couch over there, stupefied, while you are plotting with me and the other physicians to carry out the work we have in hand."

"That is the idea," said Nick.

"My first business, then, would be to get as many photographs of the unconscious man as possible. A dozen or more, perhaps, would be taken, so that I would possess every possible view of his face and features, for I am considering that it would be my duty to make your features over to resemble his as nearly as possible."

"Certainly."

"We must not forget that it is necessary that he should be returned to his house almost at once; or, rather, that you be taken there in his place, representing him, so that the idea will be given out that he has been taken home after the accident. You must understand, therefore, Carter, that the operation cannot be begun on your face until after you have been taken to Sturtevant's room in Sturtevant's house.

"We will say that I am so expert in my profession that, with the aid of the photographs and the two assistants who are here with me in the guise and under the name of nurses, I can accomplish what I have set out

to do. My brother is here to take charge of Sturtevant, who henceforth will be Stanton, as soon as we have taken our departure?"

The detective nodded.

"Having obtained the photographs, and having studied the general character and contour of the face I wish to reproduce in your own, and otherwise prepared myself for the series of operations I will have to perform upon you, I swathe you in bandages, so that you will be unrecognizable by anybody, and you are conveyed in the place of Sturtevant to Sturtevant's house, accompanied by me and the two assistants who are acting as nurses, just as you have stated it was done."

"And Sturtevant," said Nick, "is left here in the care of the other doctor, your brother."

"Precisely; we will come to that presently."

"Go on, doctor."

"Arrived at Sturtevant's house, the details of the accident are given out; you, being supposedly badly wounded, are conducted to his room, and put to bed in Sturtevant's bed. Immediately after that every one is excluded from the room save those that are in the secret that is being enacted, and at once I begin operations.

"With the aid of my two assistants, and because I have been careful to prepare everything in advance, and have taken with me to that house every instrument and drug and anesthetic and remedy that I will require, the work of transforming you into Robert Sturtevant is begun without delay.

"And I must remind you, Carter, that all that happened four weeks ago."

"Why do you mention that fact again?"

"Because if it were a week ago or less, it would be a comparatively easy matter to undo the work that has been done, but under the circumstances as they exist at the present moment, I am of the opinion that the work has progressed so far that if there should come an expose you would find it difficult to substantiate the accusations you would make. Four weeks is a long time, and much may be accomplished by surgeons in twenty-eight days."

"I know," said Nick, nodding his head emphatically. "Stanton is probably so thoroughly made over by this time, and the wounds inflicted during the operations are so nearly healed, that already it will be difficult to upset what they have accomplished."

"I might not be difficult," said the doctor, "were there only one man; but here there are two, and you must not forget that while Stanton has been undergoing the operations to make him over into the character of Sturtevant, the latter has been subjected to the same sort of treatment, and has not only been made over into Stanton, as nearly as it could be done facially, but has also, without doubt, been so far deprived of his reason that he will not be in condition to deny that he is Stanton, or even to state who he really is."

"How do you think they will go about that part of the work?" asked the detective.

"That is a question that I cannot answer, Carter. I have no more idea about it than you have. The Rudinis are almost devilish in their ingenuity, in their daring, and in their skill. You mentioned, a little while ago, a phrase which is a common expression among physicians and surgeons by using the term 'a clot on the brain.' Whether the Rudinis could create such a condition artificially, I do not know; but it is safe to suppose that they have thought out every difficulty before they undertook the stupendous task, and have prepared themselves to meet each one as it arose."

"One thing is certain," said the detective; "if we are to proceed on the present plan, and that is that the men have been transposed; that Sturtevant is now at Stanton's house, and that Stanton is at Sturtevant's."

"Yes," said the doctor.

"Now, tell me just how much time you think will be required by the Rudinis before they would be prepared to lift the veil, so to speak, and to permit Stanton to be seen by Sturtevant's servants and friends."

"I have been expecting that question, and I should say that time is almost ripe. I should say that it would require from four to six weeks."

"No more than that?"

"I think not."

"Then, as a matter of fact, the conspirators are almost ready to defy the world now, while we sit here together talking about it."

"Yes."

"Then if I, as the detective, or, rather, as the friend of Robert Sturtevant, should go now to Sturtevant's house and attempt to unmask the impostor who is there, it is likely, is it not, that I would be laughed at for my pains? That my arguments would be met with derision, and that I would be able to find nobody, with possibly the exception of yourself and Sturtevant's valet, Morris, to agree with me, or to believe that I had any foundation for my accusations?"

"I think, Carter, that those would be precisely the conditions you would encounter."

"Then," said Nick, "it would seem to me the correct move not to attempt just now the unmasking of the impostor, but rather to undertake the recovery of Sturtevant himself, now confined at Stanton's house."

"I think that is the right idea."

"Let us suppose another view of the case," continued the detective.

"Well, what now?"

"Suppose, doctor, it were possible for me to go out from here now and return in a short time, bringing Sturtevant with me from Stanton's house; suppose, in fact, that I should bring him here to you between now and daylight to-morrow morning. Suppose, also, that we find him so changed that his best friends would not recognize him. Suppose we find him to be made over sufficiently like Stanton so that the few details that were lacking might be charged to the accident. Suppose we were to find him, if not imbecilic, at least so changed by drugs, or otherwise, that he is incapable of establishing his own identity, or even asserting it; suppose all these conditions to exist when I should bring him here, do you believe that your own science and efficiency is capable of restoring him to his proper self?"

The doctor leaned back in his chair and thrust his thumbs into the armholes of his waistcoat, and wrinkled his brows while he answered slowly:

"That is a question which it is absolutely impossible to answer. I don't know whether it could be accomplished or not until I see the patient, Carter."

"Yes?"

"I think that is the proper method for you to pursue; I think it is better for you to leave the impostor undisturbed, and to leave those serving him without the idea of your suspicions, until at least you have the other man, Sturtevant, himself here in this institute, where he may be entirely under our charge."

The detective started to his feet with an exultant exclamation:

"I see it all now, doctor," he said. "I see my way clear."

"Well, what is your plan?"

"My plan is to steal Sturtevant away from Stanton's house, and bring him here; and to accomplish it so secretly, that the conspirators will not only have no idea of where he has been taken, but will not know, although they may suspect, why he has been stolen away from them. I will make my plans to accomplish that very thing before the dawn of another day!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE PATIENT IN THE FRONT ROOM.

It was long after midnight when the detective, accompanied by Chick and Patsy, entered the automobile and ran it slowly through the streets until they were within a few doors of Stanton's home. Here, while Patsy remained with the car, the detective and Chick descended, and presently mounted the steps of the house they intended to enter.

Nick Carter had selected that hour in the morning when burglars love to work, between two and three, and he and his assistant were both disguised, so as to thoroughly carry out the parts they intended to play. They wore half-masks over their faces, and had otherwise rigged themselves out after the generally accepted idea of the ordinary burglar, and when they mounted the steps, the detective, instead of using his picklock upon the door, as he ordinarily would have done, in order to enter a house, stepped upon the ledge of the window, where, with the assistance of Chick, he speedily pried it open with a burglar's jimmy.

It was less than ten minutes after the automobile stopped in that street when Nick and his first assistant stepped through the window and disappeared in the interior of the house, and the entrance was made so deftly and so expeditiously, that Nick knew that when investigation should be entered upon in the morning by the police officials of that precinct, the breakage would be attributed to an ordinary burglar's enterprise.

A dim light was burning in the hall as they stepped from the front parlor into it, and, after listening for a moment and detecting no sound, Nick led the way up the stairs, while Chick paused long enough to undo the fastenings of the doors, so that their egress could be made without hindrance when their work within the house should be accomplished.

The second floor was like that of the majority of houses in the city of New York, consisting of a large room at the front of the building, usually called the alcove-room, another one, almost as large, at the rear, and the two connected by dressing-room and lavatory. The detective, of course, knew nothing about the interior of that house, save that it was planned as others are of its

kind, but he had noticed, when he had called there that day, that the windows of the front room on the second floor were darkened, and he had no doubt that it was the apartment in which the surgical operation was being performed, or in which the patient was slowly recovering from the experiments that had been made upon him.

At the landing at the top of the stairs they paused to listen again, and Nick threw the light of his electric-torch upon the closed doors for a moment, and then quietly drew Chick after him into the bath-room at the end of the hall, where he whispered:

"It is my idea, Chick, that the front room is occupied by the patient, where one of the nurses is probably in attendance. This rear room here would be probably occupied by Rudini, and the other nurse is probably asleep in one of the rooms on the floor above us. I think it will be our policy to enter both these rooms at the same time. You take the front one, where you will probably find the nurse on guard, and I'll take the rear one, where I will try to overcome Doctor Rudini without permitting him to give any alarm. Remember, Chick, if it is possible, I want you to chloroform the nurse, as I shall the doctor, if I can, so they will not discover what our intentions are until they awaken later to find that their patient is missing."

He waited until Chick had passed through the hall to the front end of it, and then, with a slight click of his tongue as a signal, he turned the knob of the door, stepping quickly through it and closing it behind him. There was a light burning there, also turned low, but it formed sufficient illumination for him to discover the form of the doctor stretched upon the bed, where he was sleeping, and Nick stood for a moment waiting to see if the noise of his entrance had disturbed the sleeping man.

Perceiving no movement, he stepped forward toward the bed, but just as he did so, Rudini started and sat upright, instantly pulling a pistol, which he discharged so quickly that the detective had no opportunity to prevent it, and the bullet whistled so closely past the detective's ear that he felt the wind of it even as it crashed into a glass-covered picture on the wall behind him, shattering it to fragments and startling the whole house awake with the noise of the report and the crash that came after it.

And at the same instant he heard the sound of a struggle in the front room, and realized that all had not gone as smoothly with Chick as he had hoped might be the case.

But with the instant of the discharge of the pistol, Nick Carter leaped forward toward the bed, meeting the doctor, who was attempting to leave it, half-way, and who was in the very act of firing the pistol a second time when Nick seized him, tore it from his grasp, and threw the physician back upon the bed, where he held him, choking and gasping and struggling, in an almost superhuman effort to free himself.

So strong was the doctor, and so agile in his movements, and so catlike in his methods of fighting, that the detective had no opportunity to make use of the chloroform he had brought with him, and he was compelled to wind the man in the bedclothing, in order to stop his struggles and to choke him severely in order to still his cries for assistance.

The man was lithe and slippery in the detective's grasp, and was possessed of much more strength than one would have supposed, to look at him, but the detective finally succeeded in tying his hands and feet together and in forcing the end of one of the blankets into his mouth, so that he could not cry out. He had just accomplished this, when the door of the room was thrown violently open, and a man clad in pajamas rushed into it to the doctor's rescue.

Nick had no doubt that this was the other assistant or nurse, who had been aroused from his sleep by the noise, but fortunately there had been time for the detective to prepare for his coming, and he met him halfway across the room with a blow from his fist delivered straight from the shoulder, which sent the nurse to the floor insensible and incapable of offering further impediment to Nick Carter's plans.

The detective took the time to fasten this man also securely, and then he dashed through the connecting rooms into the front one, where he arrived just in time to discover that Chick had not prospered so well in his own part of the affray.

The assistant was flat on his back on the floor, and the nurse was atop of him with his hand clutching Chick's throat, while his other hand was raised in the air grasping a surgeon's lancet, which was just in the act of descending, when Nick leaped forward and knocked it from his grasp with a kick of his foot.

In another moment this man was also secured, and then they turned their attention to the bed, whereon the figure of a man was lying with his face swathed in bandages, with his eyes gleaning wide-awake and staring at them as if he did not in the least understand what was happening.

Whether this man was Robert Sturtevant whom they sought or not, there was no way of determining at the moment, but at least, whoever he might be, the detective was now in a position to carry out his plans to the end.

He stepped forward to the side of the bed and, bending over the patient, asked:

"Who are you? Are you Robert Sturtevant?"

There was no answer; the eyes of the man only glared at him, but he made no effort to reply.

"Can't you tell me who you are?" asked Nick again.

Still there was no reply and no movement; it was as if the man were paralyzed, and that animation remained in his eyes alone, and then, as the detective was about to continue with his questions, there were noises from the rear room, where he had left the doctor and the nurse, whom he had knocked down, and instantly following it the two men leaped through the passageway and threw themselves violently upon Nick Carter and Chick, who had just struggled to his feet, and who was only partially recovered from the effects of the severe choking he had received.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CAPTURE OF A CONSPIRATOR.

It is not necessary to describe the struggle that followed; sufficient to say that it was a severe one, and terrific while it lasted, but the detectives finally managed to overcome their adversaries, who were once more bound and gagged and carried back again to the rear room, together with the third man, who had so nearly overcome Chick.

And now the detective thought of another idea which might further his plans considerably, and with a gesture to his assistant to remain silent, he stepped into the hall, closing the door after him, and stood there for a long time listening to hear if any other possible occupants of the house had been disturbed by the noises that had been made.

He heard no sound, but he wanted to be assured, and so, still leaving Chick on guard, he passed up the stairs to the third floor, and then to the fourth one, pausing and listening at each door as he passed it. At last, satisfied that they were not likely to be disturbed, he returned to the second floor and motioned to Chick to follow him, passed through once more to the bedside of the patient in the alcove-room.

Again he sought to question him.

"Are you Robert Sturtevant?" he asked in a low tone, bending closely over the man, whose eyes still gleamed strangely, but who did not seem to have attempted to make any move whatever.

There was no answer.

"Do you know Nick Carter?" he asked, hoping that the mention of his own name might draw from the patient some sign of recognition; but there was none.

"Are you suffering any pain?" he asked, after another pause; and still there was no reply.

He turned back the bedclothes then, and discovered that, save for the fact that each of the patient's hands were bandaged, he seemed to have sustained no further injury, and then he turned to his assistant.

"Help me, Chick," he said, "to wrap Sturtevant in the bedclothing, and we will carry him outside at once, When we have done that, I want you and Patsy to take him in the automobile to the doctor who is to receive him, and as soon as you have delivered him and seen him safely into the doctor's care, I wish you both to return here as quickly as possible."

The bandages on the patient's face precluded any possibility of Nick's determining to what extent it had been operated upon, but he perceived at once that the man seemed to suffer no pain, and that he offered no objection to the rather rough handling he received, although they were as tender as possible with him.

And so he was presently carried down the stairs and out through the front door to the automobile that was in waiting.

Nick was not unprepared for interruption during this process, for it was more than likely that a policeman might happen along, or that a belated resident of the street might be passing at the time; but they were fortunate in encountering nobody, and so presently Nick Carter stood upon the curb alone, watching the automobile as it disappeared around the corner of the street carrying the patient to the care of that other expert physician whose services the detective had engaged.

And when it was gone he turned about and reentered the house, where he closed the door securely after him, and ascended again to the second floor and to the room where his bound and gagged prisoners awaited him.

As the reader knows, it had been his original intention to steal away the patient without the knowledge of Badini and the nurse, if possible, but events had ma-

terially changed his plans, so that he had determined upon adopting a different course, and accordingly, as soon as he entered the room, he approached Rudini and removed the gag from his mouth.

At once the physician began to indulge himself in a torrent of abuse in French, and the detective permitted him to continue, while he smiled placidly upon him, knowing that the exuberance of the man's anger must presently cease for want of breath or for lack of energy to give it expression.

"Doctor," he said, when there came an opportunity for him to speak, "you are an Italian and also a Parisian, or at least your office is in Paris, I am told; but I have no doubt you speak English as well as I do."

"Yes, I speak it quite well enough to tell you what a miscreant you are," was the angry retort.

"We will pass that as being unimportant at the present moment," said Nick. "I am wondering if you know who I am."

"Yes; I know you are a burglar and a midnight-marauder, a scoundrel and an ingrate! You have broken into this house! You have entered it! You have assaulted me and my assistants, and for that you will go to prison, sir! You shall go to prison!"

"Not quite so fast, doctor," said Nick easily. "You will have time presently to talk all you want to. Just now I shall want you to answer some questions for me."

"I will answer no questions. I will do nothing. You have disturbed me. You have assaulted me, and now you intend to rob me! You have disturbed my patient, who is in the next room, and who is in a critical condition. You have disturbed him, and it may kill him. He may die because of your disturbing him, and because of the noises you have made. You are a scoundrel, sir, a scoundrel!"

"Very likely," said Nick; "but there are others, doctor."

"You go away! You go away at once! I will have nothing to do with you; I will not answer your questions!"

"I am afraid, doctor, that you will have considerable to do with me before you are through, for when I leave the house I am going to take you with me. If you had remained quietly in your bed when I entered the room and permitted yourself to be chloroformed, as a gentleman should, I might have left you here; as it is, I cannot do that, and as for the disturbance, it is you and these two men here who have created that; not I."

"Ah! You are a scoundrel! I will not answer you; I will not talk to you. You have perhaps committed a murder in coming here. My patient will die because of you!"

"That brings me to my question, doctor; who is your patient?"

"My patient; who is he? That is none of your business!"

"Oh, yes, it is, for I have chosen to make it my business. Again, doctor, who is he?"

"I will not answer you; I have told you that I will not answer your questions. You are a scoundrel, a burglar, a night-marauder; I will not answer you!"

"Is the name of your patient Stanton—or Sturtevant?" asked Nick quietly, but with such low emphasis and with such telling effect that the doctor started violently, and was for once, at least, lost for words with which to reply.

"Is your patient named Stanton—or Sturtevant?" asked Nick again.

"Ah! Who are you? Why do you ask me such questions as that? Why does it concern you who my patient is? What is your business here? Why have you attacked me in the way you have done, and why do you bind me and gag me, and then ask me foolish questions?"

"Doctor," said Nick, by way of reply, "have you ever happened to hear of a person by the name of Nick Carter?"

"Ah, yes! Nick Carter! I have heard of him. Why? Why do you ask me that? What has Nick Carter to do with this, or with me, or with my patient, or with you, who are a scoundrel and a burglar?"

"I asked you if you had ever heard of Nick Carter, doctor, because I happen to be that person."

"You lie! You lie! You are lying to me! It is not true; why should Nick Carter come here? He is a detective, so I am told."

"There is every reason, doctor, why Nick Carter should be here, as he is at the present moment in my own person, for I repeat to you, I am Nick Carter. Your scheme, the conspiracy you are carrying out, the plot of the Stantons that you are enabling them to perfect, all these things are known to me, doctor, and you will save yourself a great deal of trouble and inconvenience if you make up your mind here and now to be entirely frank with me, and to answer the questions I shall ask you."

"I do not know you. There is no conspiracy, no plot; I will not answer your questions. I do not know what you are talking about. You are a scoundrel! I demand that you release me at once!"

"You will be released in good time, doctor; have no fear of that; but when you are, it will be to go to prison, if not to suffer a worse penalty, for the crimes you have performed and are now engaged in performing. Hark! Do you hear that?"

"I hear the toot of an automobile horn; yes. Why?"

"Because, doctor, that automobile is here to take you away; you, and your two assistants, the worthies here who have been assisting you; and I have engaged another physician in the same line of practise as yourself, doctor, and to-morrow he will begin to operate on your face just as you have been operating upon Robert Sturtevant's—unless, in the meantime, you make up your mind to tell me all you know about this conspiracy."

CHAPTER VIII.

NICK CARTER INDULGES IN STRATEGY.

The detective realized that it would be impossible for him to obtain any further information from Doctor Rudini at that time, and so, quickly replacing the gag in the physician's mouth, he descended to the front door, where he admitted Chick, whom he found there awaiting him.

They returned to the second floor together, and then, one by one, carried the doctor and his two assistants out of the house and deposited them in the automobile. Then, after giving a few hasty instructions to Chick and Patsy concerning what they were to do with their prisoners, Nick for the second time watched the automobile move away from the house, after which he returned to it and busied himself in restoring to a semblance of order the rooms that he and Chick had violated by their entrance and the struggles that had followed it. Such articles of furniture and chairs as had been moved or overthrown during the struggle he restored to their proper positions, and he even went so far as to make up the bed carefully in which the doctor had been sleeping, doing it with all the expertness of a chambermaid, and smiling with satisfaction when he saw at the end of his work that the room was as trim and neat as if the bed had not been occupied at all, and as if nothing there had been disturbed.

After that he visited the front room, and there he busied himself in the same manner, until this apartment was also left as spick and span as if the departing guests had had a distinct method in their procedure.

Over in one corner of this front room was a desk that was literally covered with vials and bottles of medicine and rolls of bandages and instruments and other accessories of the profession of the Rudinis, and all of these Nick Carter packed helter-skelter into a suit case that he dragged from a closet for the purpose.

When everything was in readiness for his departure, he seated himself at a table where there were writing-materials, and in the French language he wrote the following letter:

"MONSIEUR STANTON: So much has been at stake in the carrying out of the conspiracy we have entered upon, and the promises of wealth to accrue from it are so great and so enticing to me, that I have determined to play a better and more important part in the game that you have so ably prepared.

"I know that now you are under the care of my brother, who will deliver this message to you, for I shall send it under cover of his name. It may be that he will read it before he delivers it to you, and it is possible that he may give it to you to read first, but in the latter case you may acquaint him with its contents, and may say to him that nothing that he can say or do, and no arguments that he can advance, will turn me from the purpose I have decided upon, as will be herein stated presently.

"First, and before going further, I must assure you, Monsieur Stanton, that I am not writing this letter by my own hand, since chirography is so easy to trace; if I did so, it might be possible to bring it home to me by accusing me of writing it, and by afterward proving that I did so.

"I am therefore writing it by the hand of another, as I have said, in order to tell you that your plans will not succeed in the substitution of yourself for Mr. Robert Sturtevant, by means of the surgical science of my brother and myself, unless you conform to the stipulations I shall make.

"They are: That you must find your way to pay me two hundred thousand dollars in your money in cash before I consent to deliver up to you the man whom I now have in my charge, who is the real Monsieur Sturtevant, as you know, and who is necessary to you for the completion of your plans. I have taken him away to a place I have selected, where I will keep him in a condition from which I can easily restore him to himself at any time I am pleased to do so; and you must understand that it will be quite as easy for me to do so as it was to make him over into another being, as you directed me to do.

"But you should know that I have all along con-

templated this move, and therefore have not changed his features, and will not do so until I have received the payment as aforesaid.

"I will communicate with you later, in person, and will then complete the arrangements that I have here suggested; but in the meantime you must understand that I have hidden my patient away so thoroughly that nothing that you can do will suffice to reveal his location to you. I do not sign my name for obvious reasons, but you will know well enough from whom this letter comes to you."

The detective read it over carefully twice after he had finished the writing, and then enclosed it in an envelope, which he addressed with the two words: "Monsieur Stanton." This envelope he sealed and enclosed in another one, upon which he wrote the single name "Rudini," and this he dropped into his pocket, and, having turned the lights low as he found them upon entering the house, he descended the stairs and was presently upon the street walking rapidly toward the avenue.

He caught a car there and left it at the corner nearest the institute of his friend, to which he had sent Rudini's patient, and where he found that the doctor had removed the bandages and was engaged in a careful examination of the work that had been done by the Rudinis, one of whom was now a prisoner in the strong-room on the top floor of Nick Carter's house.

When the detective entered the room, the surgeon quickly concealed the face of his patient from view, and, turning to the detective, he remarked calmly:

"I would rather that you did not see him now, Carter. It is not necessary that you should, and the sight would only shock you. He is under the influence of anesthetics at present, and my aids here will care for him through the rest of the night. Come down into my office now, where I can talk to you quietly," and so the two descended to the surgeon's office, where Nick at once inquired:

"Tell me about the condition of your patient, doctor."

"It is not so bad as I feared," was the reply. "He has been operated upon, and his face has been so changed that he will not know himself when he recovers sufficiently to look into the glass and study his own reflection, but he will be even better looking than he was before, for all that."

"That is a comfort, at least," said the detective smilingly. "How about his mind?"

"I can tell you nothing about that for at least twelve hours yet, Carter."

"Do you think that he has been operated upon so that he will have lost his reason or his memory?"

"I don't know. I haven't an idea, and it will be impossible to determine, as I have already told you, short of twelve or fourteen hours."

"You say that his face has been extensively operated upon?"

"Yes."

"And is it healing?"

"It is almost healed. Another week would have sufficed and will suffice."

"Do you think it will be advisable for you to attempt any changes in what has been done in that respect?"

"No; I think that in that respect I will leave matters as they are."

"Has the attempt been made to change him so that he resembles Stanton?"

"You must remember that I don't know Stanton, and therefore cannot answer that question. Neither did I know Sturtevant, so I cannot explain to you what changes have been made. I can only say that now the patient up-stairs has a straight, well-formed nose, and a full, round face, and that his ears are rather closer to his head than is ordinarily the case."

"That is not a bad description of Stanton," said Nick. "Tell me exactly what you would like me to do now, doctor, in regard to your patient."

"I can tell you that, Carter, if you will do it."

"I will. I'll promise you that."

"I would like you to leave him absolutely alone in my charge for at least three days. I would like to have you keep away from this place for that length of time; not because I do not wish you to know what I am doing, but because I do not want to be disturbed by questions and surmises concerning his condition or the probable result of the experiments that Rudini has made upon him, and of the experiments I shall make to offset them. In a word, Carter, I want to be left alone with my patient, for I will confess to you that I have taken a deep interest in this affair, and until I am prepared to give you a decided opinion about Mr. Sturtevant, I don't want to be interviewed; I want to devote my entire time and attention to him."

"Good!" said Nick. "I quite appreciate your motives, and I agree to them entirely."

Five minutes later he was in the street again, going rapidly toward his own house, where, as soon as he ar-

rived, he called Patsy to him, who, of course, was awaiting his arrival.

And then he took the letter from his pocket that he had written at Stanton's house, and, giving it to Patsy, said:

"I want you to make yourself up as an American District Messenger-boy and deliver this letter, about breakfast time, at the Larches. When you arrive there, ask for Doctor Rudini, stating that you have a letter for him which you must deliver only into his own hands. If Morris should come to the door, or you should see him, do not recognize him, and do not let him recognize you. When Rudini appears, give him the letter, and tell him there is no answer. Say that the gentleman who entrusted the letter to you said that he would call for the answer in person. While you are doing that, take as good a mental photograph of that Doctor Rudini as you can, and be prepared to give me a thorough description of his appearance. And now tell me what you have done with your prisoners."

"They are all locked up together in the strong-room at the top of the house," responded Patsy.

"That's all right," said Nick; "and now you can go about your errand."

CHAPTER IX.

NICK CARTER MAKES A THREAT.

It was daylight when the detective sought his room for a little sleep, for, as we know, the entire night had been taken up with his visit at the Stanton house, and the events that had succeeded it.

But he knew that his three prisoners were safely cared for in the strong-room at the top of the house, each fastened to his cot, so that, while free to move about it, there was no opportunity for them to reach one another. They could converse, but they could not touch each other across that room; and it was a place from which no one had ever succeeded in making his escape until Nick Carter had chosen to offer release.

It was not until after a belated breakfast that the detective called Chick to him and said:

"Chick, as you have doubtless already suspected, I altered all my plans for this case, after we entered that house last night. The fact that we disturbed the doctor, and that he and his men put up such a fight, necessitated that much."

"I did suppose so—yes."

"It was my first idea to puzzle the whole crowd, by the inexplicable disappearance of the star-patient. I thought if we could enter the house quietly, chloroform the doctor and his assistants, and then steal away their patient without their knowledge, that it would be a good game to play upon them."

"It would have been."

"Had my plans succeeded as I formed them, they would have awakened in the morning without at first knowing that anything had happened. The nurse in the room with the patient would have discovered that he was missing; but otherwise they would not know they had been disturbed until they discovered the forced window down-stairs, and also that the house had been burglarized, for I did intend to take away with us enough of the silverware to carry out the deception."

Chick nodded.

"Rudini would not have known what to make out of it. He would have discovered that burglars had entered the house during the night, and that his patient was gone. Of course, he would at once have suspected that their plots were known, or at least guessed it, but the point is that he would not have been *sure* of it."

"By no means."

"And so he would have gone at once to the Larches, to his brother, and reported the affair. Then the two Rudinis would have put their heads together, and would have done something to betray themselves and all their plans. That is exactly what I intended to accomplish."

"And now——?" asked the assistant.

"Now, of course, I must work differently—but I think it is perhaps better as it is."

"I am sure of it."

"I haven't told you yet what I intend to do."

"I can guess."

"Let's hear you try, then."

"I think you are contemplating giving Rudini—the Rudini that we have here, in this house—a lesson in his own science."

"Precisely. That is right."

"Will you tell me how you are going to do it?"

"I will do that. I will show you."

"Shall I bring the fellow down-stairs?"

"Yes. At once."

"Where to? To what room?"

"Take him to the study; and, Chick, you had best put

the irons on his wrists, behind his back. He is a powerful man, and he has the temper of the devil. He will fight at the drop of a hat, and he scratches and claws like a cat."

"All right. I'll fix him. Do you want him now?"

"Yes. At once."

When the detective ascended to his study shortly afterward, he found Chick there, standing in front of Rudini, who was seated in a Morris chair, to which Chick had fastened him by using two pairs of handcuffs; that is, he had fastened the doctor's right ankle and his left wrist to the leg and the arm of the chair respectively, so that his right arm and left leg were free to move about as he might choose to use them; but he could not leave the chair.

A madder man never sat in a Morris chair.

His eyes blazed like the eyes of a fury, his brows were corrugated with scowls, which grew deeper and blacker as Nick entered the room, and his fingers twitched nervously, as if he would cheerfully have given all he possessed for the privilege of being free for a moment, in order to attack the men who held him so ignominiously a prisoner.

He was a fine-looking man—rather handsome, in fact, with classic features, good chin, broad forehead, and with eyes that were set rather wide apart.

But he was in a perfect fury of temper when the detective entered the room.

"This is an outrage!" he exclaimed. "And you—*you* are the man who has committed it."

He pointed one finger at the detective, and held it suspended, trembling with the nervous rage into which he was thrown.

"Yes," replied the detective quietly. "I am the man who committed it. What of it?"

"You shall be prosecuted. You shall be tried and imprisoned for this, sir. I will apply to the French consul, and *he* will attend to your case. The French republic will punish you for this. I will see to it that it is done. You are a scoundrel an ingrate, and a rascal! You are no better than a burglar! You break into a house and you attack me—in the middle of the night. You poke bedclothing into my mouth between my teeth; you tie me up as if I were a lamb for slaughter; you attack my two assistants, and I do not know what else you do there. But it is enough! Enough to hang you, sir; enough to send you to the guillotine, where you will be beheaded."

"Fortunately, doctor, we do not have guillotines in this country. They are toys with which we have dispensed. And possibly it is fortunate also that you will not be able to apply to the French consul until after I am through with you. And," he added significantly, "when I am through with you, a French consul will be about the last thing you will be thinking about."

"So? So? We will see about that, sir."

"Sure."

"I demand that you release me. I *demand* that you release me at once, monsieur."

"And I refuse."

"Do you dare to detain me here against my will?"

"I do."

"Ah! But you shall suffer for this."

"Possibly, although I do not think so. At all events, you will be the first one to suffer, doctor."

"I? I am suffering now. I suffer tortures. You have me ironed as if I were a criminal——"

"Which you are, doctor. A criminal and a scoundrel, which is a word, I believe, that you are familiar with, since you make use of it so often."

"Do you dare to threaten me? *Me?*"

"Oh, I haven't done much threatening—yet. I shall act instead of offering threats."

"You will—murder me, perhaps."

"Oh, I don't think so. At least, not at once."

"Ah, you villain! You scoundrel! My life? What is it to you? Why should you take my life, monsieur?"

"I have not said that I intended to take it, doctor."

"You have threatened it."

"Oh, well, you have made a lot of threats yourself, during the last few minutes, which you have no idea of ever carrying out."

"I have! I have! I will do as I have said. I will go to the consul; I will have you arrested; I will appeal to France. I am a citizen of France. I will not be subjected to such treatment without a protest. I——"

"That will be about enough, I think, doctor. Unless you want a gag in your mouth again, keep it closed for a few moments. If you can manage to hold in that infernal temper of yours a little, I will leave you as you are, but if you continue to talk and abuse me, I will gag you. Now, take your choice."

"I will refrain, monsieur."

"Come, that is sensible. You are not such a fool as you appear to be, after all."

"Why did you bring me down here to this room—now?"

"I brought you here," replied the detective, smiling and speaking slowly in order to give his utterance the more weight, "to give you a dose of your own medicine."

"To do—what?"

"I repeat. To give you a dose of your own medicine."

"I do not comprehend to what you refer, monsieur."

"No? I will enlighten you."

"If monsieur will be so good."

"Certainly; with pleasure. I am going to show you how to make one person look like another, in about half the time you take to do it, doctor."

"*Sacre!* What is it that you are saying?"

"You heard me, did you not?"

"I heard, but I did not comprehend. *Sacre bleu!* You mean that you would operate upon me?"

"I mean that I am about to perform an operation—yes."

"But—*mon Dieu, mon ami!* It is not possible. No, it is not. It is not what you call consistent that you should take the knife and the instrument in your hand, and that you should cut—you who know nothing about it. No; it is not possible. It would be a crime."

"Quite so—if I should do that. You are right, doctor."

"But you are not a surgeon."

"No."

"You are not even a doctor—a, what you call, physician. You are not one."

"No."

"You would not dare. You would kill me. You have not the experience with the instrument. You are not able to perform operations like that one—no?"

"Still," said the detective coolly, "it is necessary that we should look alike, doctor, just as you thought it necessary that Stanton and Sturtevant should be changed in their appearance."

"But I do not wish to resemble you, sir. I am satisfied with my own face as it is; and the torture of it is horrible, particularly if it is done by one who is not an expert."

"Nevertheless, doctor, you will have to submit. Perhaps, however, you prefer to tell me all that I wish to know about that little plot of yours—the plot into which you entered, with your brother and Monsieur Stanton, to steal the millions that belong to Robert Sturtevant."

"I will tell you! I will tell you, if you will not touch me with the knife."

"Very well, that is a bargain. If you will tell me all I wish to know, and will reply truthfully to all the questions I shall ask you, I will promise in return that I will not touch you with a knife, and will not subject you to any torture more than you have already endured and are undergoing now."

"It is agreed. You are a bloodthirsty man, I know. You have threatened me, and some day you shall be made to pay dearly for the indignities you have made me suffer; but for the present moment, in order to spare myself from the torture of being operated upon—yes, I will tell you all you wish to know."

CHAPTER X.

SOME OF THE DETAILS OF THE PLOT.

"Tell me, then, what is the name of the man I took from that house where Stanton is supposed to live? What is the name of the man to whom you refer as your patient?"

"Robert Sturtevant. Yes; that is his name. He resides at a place out in the country that is called the Larches. Yes, that is Monsieur Sturtevant. He was brought there to me."

"When?"

"It is four weeks, monsieur."

"Was he injured when he was taken there to you?"

"No; not at all. He was unhurt."

"Was there an automobile accident at all?"

"No; not in his case, or in that of Mr. Stanton."

"They were neither of them in an accident, then?"

"No."

"Was Mr. Sturtevant unconscious when he was taken to you?"

"No. He was in his right mind; he was in the full possession of his senses."

"What induced him to go there, to that house, where you were?"

"Monsieur Stanton brought him to me; we had a conversation; then a glass of wine; and then—pfouff! The wine was drugged. I had prepared it myself, and Monsieur Sturtevant dropped off into a sleep from which he has not been permitted to awaken since that time."

"Do you mean that you have kept him drugged all this time?"

"*Oui,* monsieur."

"Go on. Tell me who was there, in that house, when Sturtevant was taken to you."

"There was my brother Emile, with two of his assistants; there was I, myself, with my two assistants, and there was also Monsieur Stanton."

"You were all there together, do you mean?"

"No, monsieur, no; my brother and the four assistants waited in another room that adjoined the one in which we were seated. They were waiting for the wine to be given that would put the gentleman to sleep. But when it was done they entered the room—yes."

"What was done then?"

"Ah, then," Rudini rubbed his hands together at the recollection of it all, "we made what you call the photographs of the gentleman; and Emile, he made a pencil-drawing of the head and face of the gentleman. We were a long time in doing that."

"I see. Where was the automobile and the chauffeur all that time."

"Ah, ze chauffeur, he was away, running the automobile into a telegraph-pole, in order that it might be broken as if there had been an accident—yes."

"Well, go on with what happened in that room."

"We carried the unconscious man to the room where you found him. He was laid upon the bed—that was after the pictures had been made, you must know."

"Yes."

"Then the chauffeur returned, saying that he had wrecked the machine, and had given out the news that Messieurs Stanton and Sturtevant had both been severely injured. That was sufficient; that was as it had been agreed upon between us."

"Go on. What happened next."

"When the chauffeur returned, he brought a carriage with him, and into that carriage my brother Emile descended with Monsieur Stanton. Then they drove away to the house that is called the Larches."

"Stanton was as well when he entered that carriage as he ever was—eh?"

"*Oui,* monsieur."

"Nothing was done to his face, or attempted, until after he was taken to the Larches?"

"Nothing at all, save that it was covered with bandages. I forgot to say, that in the meantime Monsieur Sturtevant had been undressed and put to bed, and that now Monsieur Stanton wore the clothing that had been worn by his friend."

"Exactly."

"Then we covered his face with bandages, which we stained to appear as if they were dressings for a wounded man, and then he was driven away with my brother and the chauffeur, who took him to the home of Monsieur Sturtevant."

"I understand."

"And Monsieur Sturtevant was left with me and my two assistants."

"What became of the other two assistants? Those who were to help your brother?"

"They went to the Larches by a different route, so that they would arrive later, as if they had been sent for—you see?"

"Yes."

"And the other patient—he was left with me, for my experiments, for my beloved surgery. Ah, it is ecstasy I feel when I have a subject like him to work upon. So healthy, so well, so strong, and so able to resist the effects of the shock which always follows upon an operation as serious as that one was. It was great, sir, very great; and it has been successful."

"You have finished with your surgical operations upon him, then?"

"Ah, sir, yes. The wounds have only to finish healing now, and then—he will not be as handsome as he was before, but he will be different; ah, so different. He will be exactly like what Monsieur Stanton was before my brother operated upon him."

"It was your duty to make Sturtevant look like Stanton, was it not?"

"It was, and I have succeeded. There were also other things to do."

"What, for instance?"

"The man had a hideous tattoo-mark inscribed on his back, between the shoulders. It was necessary that it should be removed. In order to do that, the back had to be wounded, lacerated, cut; I had to what you call make a sore there, and so remove the marks of the tattoo; and then the sore had to be healed, so that no trace of the former marks would remain. It has all been done. And there was another thing, too."

"What was that?"

"The monsieur had somehow lost an entire finger from one hand, and part of a finger from the other one. It was necessary that those missing fingers should be replaced, since the hands of Monsieur Stanton are perfect,

or nearly so. It was necessary that Monsieur Sturtevant's hands should be perfect also, or nearly so, so that in case he ever recovered his senses sufficiently to proclaim that he was Robert Sturtevant, one might point at his hands and say: 'Monsieur Sturtevant had the little finger missing from one hand, and one joint of the second finger missing from the other hand. Your hands are whole. How is that—eh?'"

Nick nodded. "Did you make his hands whole?" he asked.

"I did, monsieur. They are whole now, and nearly healed."

"How did you do it?"

"Monsieur Stanton found a man who was willing to sacrifice two of his fingers for a fair price. That man was taken to the house. Ah, that was a grand operation, indeed."

"You brute. How was it done?"

"Ah! I first cut off the ends of the stumps on Monsieur Sturtevant's maimed hands, in order to prepare them to receive the others, when they should be grafted upon them—see?"

"Yes."

"Then I amputated the fingers from the man who had sold them for a price; and then I grafted those fingers of one man upon the hands of another man, and behold! it was done. And, monsieur, the healing has been so perfect that you cannot see where the grafting was done."

"So that when Mr. Sturtevant walks abroad again, if he ever does, he will have two whole hands well filled with fingers, will he?"

"He will, indeed; only they may be somewhat stiff, the new ones."

"And the tattoo-mark on his back will have disappeared?"

"Utterly."

"And instead of a pug-nose, he will have a straight one; instead of ears that stood out a little from the sides of his head, he will have a pair of them that set closely to the head, will he, doctor?"

"He will, indeed."

"And up there at the other house—at the Larches—I suppose that Stanton has been given a pug-nose, such as Sturtevant used to wear, eh?"

"He has."

"And dapply ears? And has he also been deprived of the two fingers we have been talking about?"

"He has."

"Why weren't his fingers used for the grafting, instead of buying some from another man?"

"That would not have answered at all. The fingers would become shortened in the operation, and would not answer the purpose. No, it was better to do it in the way it was done."

"What about the tattoo-marks for Stanton's back?"

"One of the men who assists my brother is an expert with the tattooer's pencil. It has been his duty to perform that miracle. But, of course, you must remember that I have not seen Monsieur Stanton since he went away from the house, when the other gentleman was left in my charge. I do not know how well my brother has succeeded in his duties. I only know that I have succeeded perfectly. But he is even more expert than I am, so I think it is safe to say that all has gone well, up there."

"Doubtless. Now, doctor, you stated a moment ago that Sturtevant had not been permitted to regain consciousness since he came under your charge. How was that?"

"Ah, it was not necessary that he should suffer, monsieur."

"No. But what did you do to render him unconscious?"

"I administered certain ingredients that I had prepared for that purpose."

"And so kept him stupefied—eh?"

"*Oui*, monsieur."

"Is the effect of that drug, or of those drugs, you administered lasting?"

"No, indeed; only for a few hours at a time."

"And what is the after-effect of it all?"

"There is no after-effect at all. He will know nothing of the lapse of time when he recovers, as he must have done by this time—or will do soon."

"Recovers his right senses, do you mean?"

"Yes."

"You have not stolen his reason away from him, then?"

"No, no, monsieur; not yet."

"What do you mean by 'not yet'?"

"I mean that the time had not yet come to do it; or, rather, I mean that, although the time had come, and it should have been done while I was operating upon his face, I wished him to have his senses long enough to

be able to see for himself the transformation that had been wrought in his appearance, and so I deferred it."

"Deferred what?"

"The trepanning of his skull, in order to make a half-imbecile of him."

"And you would have done that?"

"Certainly, monsieur. It was in the agreement."

"But you had not done it yet. You had not begun it, even?"

"No. I intended to let him return to his senses to-day or to-morrow, and then to perform the rest of the operation. I was not quite ready yet. I wanted him to see."

"Thank Heaven that I interfered with you in time!" exclaimed Nick to himself; but the French doctor replied passively:

"Yes. I am thankful, now, that you did. It is not a nice thing to do, to make an imbecile of a fine man like Monsieur Sturtevant."

CHAPTER XI.

WHAT STANTON GAINED BY THE PLOT.

"Now, tell me how the remainder of the plot was to have been worked out," said the detective.

"Ah, the rest of it would have worked itself out. It only needed the careful attention of Monsieur Sturtevant to have accomplished that, as you can see."

"Yes; I think I do see."

"Monsieur Carter, it is my own conceit that has saved the reason of Monsieur Sturtevant. But for that I would have performed the operation on his skull and have tampered with his brain, in the beginning, and now you would have in him a hopeless imbecile, for whom there would have been no cure. I think you owe me something for that, monsieur."

"Possibly, although I don't exactly see it—yet."

"My brother, Emile, in my place, would have done that first. Indeed, he directed me to do it first, so that there would be no danger of failure in our plans. But you must understand, sir, that I could not bear to perform all that beautiful work and have nobody to admire it, and so I left the trepanning of Monsieur Sturtevant's skull till the last thing. As I have said, it would have been done to-day or to-morrow, or the day following, depending much upon his condition; and then—pfouff! he would have been a fool for the remainder of his life. He would not have known his own name, and the world would have understood that he was Mr. Stanton, and that the accident had deprived him of his reason. And, on the other hand——"

"On the other hand, that same world would have supposed that Mr. Sturtevant recovered entirely from the results of the accident, and—it was a horrible plot!"

"Yes. But now, sir, you will stop it all—no?"

"You bet your life I will stop it all! How much were you to receive for your part in all this hideous affair?"

"There was to be two hundred thousand dollars divided between my brother and me, monsieur."

"And you were to receive one hundred thousand dollars for a crime that is infinitely worse than murder."

"I don't see how you make that out. We killed nobody."

"No; but you were to take away a man's reason, which is infinitely worse than taking his life."

"But look you, sir, the man himself would be alive and well. He would not know that anything was the matter with him. He would not suffer from what I did. He would have no consciousness of it left at all. It would have been the same as if I had kept him forever under the influence of an anesthetic; no worse."

"So that is how you stilled your conscience, is it?"

"It is. I said to myself that——"

"I don't care to hear by what method you argued yourself into the belief that you were in any way justified in what you were doing. Do you know anything about the present condition of Stanton?"

"No; I have told you that I have not seen him since that day, when we parted, after Monsieur Sturtevant was brought to me."

"But you have heard from your brother, haven't you?"

"*Oui.* There have been messages—and letters."

"Well, then, what can you tell me about the condition of Stanton?"

"Nothing at all, save that he is doing as well as patients always do, under the care of Emile, and that is perfect."

"I suppose his wounds—the wounds that were made by your brother's instruments, are also nearly healed by this time, are they not?"

"Yes."

"And how soon should he be able to be out, to proclaim himself as Robert Sturtevant, if I were not prepared to interfere with his plans?"

"Within another week, or within two more, at most."

"Is he now in a condition so that the bandages can be removed from his face, do you suppose?"

"Oh, the bandages have been taken away long ago. The wounds are only dressed now lightly with cloths; they are not bandaged."

"He could be seen, then, if I should go there to the house to see him?"

"Most certainly—if he would consent to be seen."

"I don't think I shall trouble about asking his consent, when I am ready to go there."

"My brother has stated in the messages he has sent to me that there was much difficulty with the back, where the tattooing was done. It did not heal as readily as it should have done. Nor did his face, for that matter, although my brother's skill overcame that part of it."

"I wonder if that brother of yours is as insufferably conceited as you are!"

"We are the same, monsieur. We are almost like twins, although there is sixteen months difference in our ages. But we look alike and are alike. I have other brothers who are——"

"I don't care anything about your other brothers—unless some of them happen to be now in this country."

"No, monsieur, they are not. The others are all in Paris—where I wish we had also remained."

"I suspect that Stanton will soon be wishing it, too. Stanton is going to get about all that is coming to him out of this business, after all, don't you think so?"

"I do not comprehend. All that is coming to him? No; I do not think so. There was the fortune of Robert Sturtevant, amounting to several millions in your money, that was coming to him; and now he will get—nothing."

"Oh, yes; he will get something."

"What, then, monsieur?"

"He will get two maimed hands—hands that are minus two fingers, whereas before they were perfect; he will get a pug-nose, where before he had a straight one; he will get two flapping ears, whereas before he had very beautiful ears, as I remember them; and he will get a beautifully tattooed back, with the picture of two crossed swords upon it. My only regret about this matter is that Sturtevant hadn't lost a leg which you could have replaced, so that you would have been obliged to take Stanton's leg off, too."

"But that would be impossible, monsieur, to graft on a leg. Even my science could not accomplish so great a task as that."

"No? You surprise me. Now, doctor, what do you think I ought to do with you?"

"I think, monsieur, that, in consideration of the fact that I delayed the operation upon the skull of Monsieur Sturtevant, and so saved his reason, you should let me go free and return to Paris, to the practise of my profession."

"Do you, indeed? I think, my merry murderer, that you will spend somewhere between ten and twenty years in this country, inside a prison, for this little escapade of yours. You are altogether too expert at your trade to be permitted to run around loose. It would not be long before you would be operating upon others, in the same way. It will be prison for yours, and for your brother, as well."

"But, monsieur——"

"Who are those two men who assisted you? And the other two, who have been assisting your brother?"

"They are what you have called them—my assistants, and his."

"And did they enter into this thing with full knowledge of what they were doing?"

"Most certainly they did."

"And for a consideration, too, I suppose?"

"Certainly. They were to receive——"

"Well?"

"What you would call in your money ten thousand dollars each, for their services. But that was to be paid out of the sum my brother and I were to receive."

"So you brought them here on your own responsibility, did you? Stanton was to pay you nearly a quarter of a million for the job—eh?"

"*Oui*, monsieur."

"Well, doctor, I think that I will now proceed with that operation."

"But, monsieur—my dear monsieur, you said—you promised me that if I would reply to your questions and tell you all I knew about this matter, you would dispense with the——"

"Oh, I am not going to operate upon you. I am going to operate on myself."

"On yourself! Use the knife on yourself? It is incredible, monsieur."

"I shall not make use of a knife."

"No? Then what are you to do, if I may ask?"

"I am going to steal your trade, or at least a part of it."

"I do not comprehend you at all, monsieur."

"Probably not. Well, your profession is in the altering

of features and facial expression, is it not? so that one person may be made to look like another—eh?"

"It is so—yes."

"I am about to give you a few pointers at your own trade. I am going to make myself look like you."

"But not with the knife—no. That would be impossible. Your features are—ah, well, it is impossible, what you say."

"Is it? I am going to make myself so like you, with a few paints, cosmetics, pigments, and other accessories, that your own brother will not know the difference when he sees me. And, while you have been talking to me, I have been studying your voice and your mannerisms, until now I can reproduce them so perfectly that he will be deceived. You call yourself a surgeon—dermatologist, I believe. I shall not steal your thunder, doctor, but I will show you a trick that is quite as effective as yours, and a whole lot less painful."

"You cannot make yourself look like me, so that it will deceive Emile."

"I can and will, as you shall see."

"I am taller than you are."

"I shall increase my height to your own by the addition of certain prepared shoes that I keep for the purpose."

"I am more slender than you."

"No so much so but what I can readily overcome that difficulty."

"And your face, it is smooth, while I wear the mustache and the imperial. My hair is black, as are also my eyes. You may be able to change the hair, but you cannot change the eyes. And, then——"

"Watch me and you will see how it is done."

And then the detective performed the threatened operation, with which he had succeeded in frightening the French doctor into telling all he knew about the conspiracy to steal Sturtevant's millions.

He drew a standard-mirror toward him and placed before it the small table, in the drawers of which were the articles he wished to use in the make-up, and then he began, with that wonderful skill of his that we have seen him practise before, to transform himself into a likeness of the man who was seated in front of him.

Bit by bit he accomplished it; little by little the transformation was made, until the amazed Frenchman saw reproduced there before his eyes a perfect counterpart of himself—and one that was so perfect that, as the detective progressed, Rudini became assured that he had heard the truth, and that his own brother would not indeed know the difference when Nick Carter should present himself at the Larches for admittance there, in order to be ushered straight into the presence of the arch-villain of the plot that had so nearly succeeded.

CHAPTER XII.

THE LAST PLAY OF THE GAME.

Nick Carter did not intend to play the character of Doctor Henri Rudini—for that was the name of the man he copied—for any other purpose than merely to get him into the presence of the patient at the Larches. He knew that he could impose upon Emile Rudini sufficiently long to accomplish that, and it was all he sought.

He knew that Stanton would be so thoroughly guarded that it might be a very difficult matter to get near him, unless some sort of strategy was employed; and, again, it was more than likely that the arch-schemer had already arranged some plan of escape that he might be able to put into practise if given the opportunity.

Nick did not intend to allow that.

He knew, moreover, that he would be expected at the Larches, because of the letter he had written, and he had already read enough of the character of Henri Rudini to know that he would not have hesitated to scheme and to carry out some such sort of a plan, had it occurred to him to do so.

Therefore the brother, when he read the letter that Nick had sent to him, would not be greatly surprised, and would be on the lookout for him.

As soon as everything was prepared, and the French doctor had been returned to the strong-room at the top of the house, to keep his assistants company, Nick called Chick and Patsy—for the latter had returned by that time—and outlined his plans to them.

Then Danny was ordered to bring the automobile around to the door, and at three o'clock in the afternoon they started out for the Larches, as Nick wished to arrive there just before nightfall, and he also wished to stop and see Sturtevant in the meantime, if the doctor who had him in charge would permit it.

But Nick had no doubt of that now, since his talk with Henri Rudini, for he knew already that Sturtevant would awaken out of his sleep in entire possession of his senses, and really none the worse for the terrible experiences through which he had passed since he had been drugged

in Stanton's house, and kept under the influence of those drugs ever since.

He left his assistants in the car, while he entered the institute, and was met at the door by the doctor himself, who had seen him approaching; and there was an expression of relief on the face of the physician, too.

"Good, Carter!" he exclaimed. "I am glad that you have come here sooner than you agreed to do so. I was just about to call you up on the telephone to ask you to come around. My patient has awakened, and—well, save that he must be exceedingly careful of himself for a time, he is doing splendidly. There is almost nothing the matter with him. He must have been in splendid physical condition, when those fiends stole him to operate on him, for his flesh has healed like a cat's, and there is nothing at all the matter with his mind."

"I had found all that out already," replied Nick. "That is the reason why I have appeared here sooner than I agreed."

"You have been told, then?"

"The whole plot."

"By whom?"

"By the doctor who operated on Sturtevant."

"I suppose you are bound for the other place, now, aren't you? Isn't that the reason why you have that make-up on?"

"Yes."

"I suppose you wondered that I knew you at once—eh?"

"No; you know that I adopt disguises, and you recognized the car and the men who were in it with me. If you had ever known Rudini, you would have know that I was he, but, as it was, you only thought that I had adopted the first disguise that occurred to me. Isn't that it?"

"Exactly."

"And now I wish to see Sturtevant for a moment. May I?"

"Sure. Come with me."

"Well, Robert," said the detective, when, a moment later, he was ushered into the room where Sturtevant was being cared for, "how are you feeling?"

"Gee whiz! Is that you, Carter? What have you got that rig on for?"

"Oh, just to finish up this little game that I am playing for you. Has Doctor Blank told you nothing about it?"

"Not a word. I don't even know why I am here. I don't know, in fact, what has happened. I seem to have passed through some terrible accident. Tell me about it."

"Not now. Later, I will; or I will let the doctor tell you about it after I have gone. But there was an accident—a very serious one. You weren't in it, exactly, but it had its effect upon you, as you may have noticed."

"Why, yes; it seems, for one thing, to have grown two fingers on my hands, where I had none before. I have only just discovered them, and was awaiting the doctor's return to ask him about them. Do things like that grow on a man when he is ill? And have I really been ill? Or what the devil has happened? I wish you would relieve my curiosity."

"There has been a plot against you, Robert; that is all. The doctor will tell you all about it when I have gone. In the meantime, you are to do exactly as he tells you to do, and are to be content to take things rather easy for another twenty-four hours. After that I think you may hear the whole story."

"What makes my face so sore? Was it smashed up in the accident?"

"Well, rather. You will soon hear about that, too."

"The last that I remember was that a fellow named Stanton called upon me and asked me to ride with him to his house, where he had some paintings that he wished me to see. He said he had been told that I was making a collection of fine art, and that he had two pictures he knew I would want. He confessed to me that he was hard up and wished to make a private sale of the pictures to me, if he could."

"So you went with him, did you?"

"Yes. We got to his house and went inside. He told me on the way that he had known my cousin Roger very well indeed, and it was only then that I associated him with the story you told me about a certain Stanton. But I had gone too far to back out then, so I entered the house with him; and in there I was prevailed upon to take a glass of wine—and that is the last that I remember."

"Don't you remember that there was another man present, to whom you were introduced? Didn't he look like me? I mean like I do now?"

"By Jove! that's so."

"Well, I will leave you now. While I am gone the doctor may tell you the whole story, if he thinks you are strong enough to hear it. You see, all that happened a month ago, Robert, and you have been down and out

all that time. There, don't question me. Talk to the doctor."

It was shortly after six o'clock that evening when the detective's automobile drove up the winding roadway and came to a stop under the porte-cochère of the Larches; and it was Morris who ran out at the door to receive them when they arrived.

But before he could utter a word to betray his surprise at seeing a man whom he supposed to be another Doctor Rudini in the automobile of Nick Carter, and accompanied by the detective's assistants, Chick made a sign to him to keep silent, and to pretend not to recognize any of them, and then, in a loud voice, he inquired:

"Is this the home of Mr. Robert Sturtevant? Because, if it is, here is a gentleman who is anxious to see a doctor who is staying here."

And at that same instant the other Doctor Rudini appeared at the door, and came swiftly forward, recognizing, as he thought he did, his brother in the car.

"Why, Henri!" he exclaimed in French. "I am glad you have arrived at last. Why did you delay so long a time. Mr. Sturtevant is most anxious to see you, and before you go to him I want to say that it is all right." And then, in a lower voice, he added: "It was a masterstroke, but how did you ever think of it? Come right inside."

He turned and led the way into the house without giving Nick a chance to reply, and just inside the door he paused and half-turned.

"Come into the library a moment," he said. "I must talk with you before you see Stanton."

"No," replied Nick, imitating to perfection the voice and the manner of Henri Rudini. "I wish to be taken directly to him. Afterward you and I will talk. Lead the way, Emile. I mean it. I will not talk with you until I have seen him."

And perforce Emile was obliged to lead the way up the stairs and along the wide corridor, from which they presently passed into the room which Sturtevant occupied when he was at home.

Emile Rudini did not look behind him all this time, and therefore he did not see that Chick and Patsy and Danny, and even Morris, were all following along silently behind them, and that they grouped themselves just outside the door as he passed inside, closely followed by Nick Carter, whom he fondly supposed to be his brother; nor did he see that the detective, as he entered at the door, raised his hand and tore the wig and the false mustache and imperial from his face, thus leaving exposed the handsome features of Nick Carter himself.

Emile's whole attention was directed toward the couch upon which the patient Stanton was lying, and it was not until the latter half-raised himself from his position, and, uttering a loud shriek, fell back again, that he realized that something had happened.

For Stanton had raised his eyes when the party entered the room, and he saw Nick Carter when the latter tore away the disguise he wore and stood revealed for what he was.

And Stanton knew in that one glance that his sins had come home to him; knew that he was found out in all his plots; knew that this was the last play of the cards, and that he had lost—and he leaped to his feet and rushed across the room before anybody could stop him; and he seized a bottle that stood upon the table there and swallowed the contents, just as Nick Carter leaped toward him to prevent the act.

But it was consummated, and Stanton pitched forward upon the floor, writhing in agony, for he had succeeded in swallowing almost a half-pint of carbolic acid—the only poison that was at hand for him to use.

He never spoke again. He only groaned and writhed—and died; and the plot of the Stantons was at an end.

We have only to add that Stanton's father fled the country and was never heard of again in New York, for, although he had not appeared directly in this affair, it was believed that he was cognizant of it throughout.

As for Sturtevant, when he had quite recovered, and he and Nick discussed the matter together, he said laughingly:

"I don't see but what I am the gainer after all, Nick. I have got a straight nose, now, and two very aristocratic ears. My hands have each a full complement of fingers, and that beastly tattoo-picture has disappeared from my back. Take it all in all, I am satisfied."

"There is one thing that is even better than that," said the detective.

"Is there? What is it?"

"You are rid of Stanton forever. He plotted against Roger, and against you; and, if he had lived, he would have continued it later. Altogether, I think you are rather lucky."

THE END.

The next number (568) will contain "The Criminal Trust; or, Nick Carter's Mysterious Client."

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TALKS WITH OUR READERS.

In various parts of the countryside of England are seen old stone crosses of a bygone age, which in themselves are objects of much interest, for, apart from the meaning of their construction, many have histories of their own. Of these early emblems of Christianity, one of exceptional interest to the tourist to England is St. Piran's cross, at Perranzabuloe. It should be mentioned that the meaning of the "Cornish round-headed crosses," as they are called, is that the cross signifies "redemption" and the circle "eternity."

The associations of this cross are woven around St. Piran, who was born in the sixth century, in Ireland, and was sent over to Cornwall on a mission. Here, on Perran Sands, he built a chapel, which was religiously used for many years by the villagers round about; but in the course of time the shifting sands threatened and finally enveloped the little building. However, the good seeds sown by the saint among the simple folk had good effect, and they were not to be done out of their shrine. Consequently, in the ninth century, they built another church farther inland, across a stream which prevented the sands from shifting, and there repaired for their devotions.

A small boy was deterred by a farmer up his apple-tree. When he had made the boy come down, the owner began to harangue him on his action. The boy answered indignantly:

"Now, you just count them apples over again! before you insinuate that I stole any of them."

In Belgium, as it stands to American cars, there is at least one European country in which many of the letter-carriers are unable to read. This is the country over which, in the ordinary course of events, the latest royal baby will be called upon to reign.

Of the Belgian people inhabiting Spain, only about 35 per cent. can read and write; another 2½ per cent. of the population can read without being able to write, but the remaining 62½ per cent. are quite illiterate. In the south of Spain it is impossible to get a servant who can read and write, and many of the postmen are unable to tell to whom the letters they carry are addressed.

They bring a bundle of letters to a house, and the owner looks through them and takes those which are—or which he thinks are—addressed to him. The Spanish postmen are not paid by the state, but receive a fee for each letter remunerate them according to the amount of their correspondence, and each letter costs the addressee at least a half-penny. It is a joke among the easy-going Spaniards that he who treats the postman best receives the most letters, whether they are intended for him or not.

In a population where 62 per cent. are illiterates and where out of the remaining 35 per cent. probably one in ten can only read or write very little, it is obvious that the badly paid and precarious posts in the lower ranks of life are not likely to be filled by the comparative few possessed of these accomplishments, and herein lies the reason for the otherwise inexplicable fact that many of the individuals handling the nation's correspondence cannot read.

A remarkable instance of presence of mind in the face of death occurred on board the steam launch *Queen of England* on the Thames, England, near Windsor.

The boat, on which there was a party of about eighty, had shot through Windsor Bridge, and was running up the river, when the engines suddenly ceased working. The engineer went below, and there found Thomas Bart, the engineer, lying unconscious. He died shortly afterward.

It is believed that Bart, seeing death approaching, had the presence of mind to shut off steam before he fell. He thus probably saved many lives.

[illegible] Bisset, in his book on wild animals says that the power of the jaws of the crocodile is terrific.

Once he had the metal of a large hook, the thickness of ordinary telegraph wire, completely bent together, the barbed point being pressed against the shank and round and round. The compressive force exerted by the jaws of the crocodile's jaws, making a less thick object than that used as bait, the hook being the metal between the wires. On another occasion he found a fish weighing seventy pounds bitten clean through as if divided by a knife. The agent was the snap of the powerful jaws of a crocodile.

A Frenchman, Paul Bert, once made experiments on the strength of a crocodile's jaws by means of a dynamometer. He found that a crocodile weighing 120 pounds exerted a force of 308 pounds in closing its jaws. The man-eaters jaw power. An African traveler once pushed the butt end of his gun into a lion's mouth, and the pressure of the jaws cracked it as though it had been struck by a steam-hammer.

Garter-snakes, grass-snakes, and venomous snakes usually invaded the congregating of a northwest church in Pennsylvania, all owing to one of the vested choir-boys making a pet garter-snake to the choir-loft on the previous Sunday, on which day, while the sermon was in progress, the owner of the pet allowed the reptile to crawl over the choir-railing and around his neck, much to the amusement of

the other choir-boys. During the week following every boy in the choir went hunting for snakes. As a result, nearly a dozen snakes of the harmless varieties were taken to service the next Sunday.

Several of the boys became frightened at the hissing and darting tongues of their new-found pets, and the reptiles escaped and were soon wriggling under the feet of members of the congregation. Screams of women who saw the snakes nearly broke up the meeting. Quiet was restored after the sexton had captured the serpents.

A pigeon belonging to John Shuker, of the Market Drayton Homing Club, released at Gloucester, England, arrived at Market Drayton in seventy-two minutes, in which time he covered a distance of seventy-two miles.

The bird returned fifteen minutes before the telegram arrived announcing its release from Gloucester.

When an Englishman takes unto himself a watch as thin as parchment he little thinks that that thin watch results from army regulations.

Up to the time of the Allies taking Paris, the ordinary watch was convex in shape and called, from its outline, a "turnip." The officers of the Russian and other armies objected to this, because its bulbous form made the uniform of a man on parade look untidy, whether it were carried in the coat or the fob. In Paris, however, they found that the watch-makers of the Palais Royal had contrived a chronometer which got over the difficulty.

Flat watches were the fashion in Paris. The English, when they appeared in the streets of the French capital, marched in not in gala dress such as the others wore, but in the raiment which they had worn on campaign. Great was the impression which their habiliments created. But they at once adopted the smart flat watch, and brought it back to England for her own manufacturers to copy.

A railway is not the sort of thing to get lost, stolen, or strayed. Yet strange things happen in Ireland, and twelve miles of railway between Birr and Parsontown, built in 1868, has absolutely disappeared.

The Great Southern Railway worked the line for a time without owning it, and then the mortgagors took possession of it, but did not work it. The authorities wanted to collect rates for it, but no one would admit ownership.

This anomalous state of things was not overlooked by the inhabitants, who, being deprived of the use of the line, possessed themselves of it by degrees, but not as a means of communication.

They carried off wires, gates, rails, buildings, and everything except a bridge.

Modern menageries and the circus have made us familiar with the snake-charmer, who is quite as frequently an American as an East Indian.

Snake-charming is to many people an attractive exhibition, and there is no doubt that the element of danger adds to the interest. Yet the secrets of snake-charming are much simpler than most people imagine.

The snakes to be handled are gorged with food until they become drowsy, or else they are drugged so that their senses are dazed. Sometimes they are kept in ice-boxes, and the cold puts them in a semitorpid condition. In either case, the snakes are only half-alive.

In handling a snake, the hand must always grasp the reptile at certain places where the head can be guided and held from the body. This is the hardest thing to learn, but, like everything else, it comes with practise. By dint of dexterity and strength, the snake is easily passed from one hand to the other, and is allowed to coil about the body. The snake-charmer, however, must be on the alert. When the snake becomes too lively, it is put back into the box.

In handling a reptile with the fangs in, great strength is needed, as the strain on the system during the performance is very severe. The grasp and the movements must be precise and accurate. There is no room for hesitancy or uncertainty. Most of the snakes handled, however, are harmless so far as poisoning is concerned.

It is doubtful whether there is a more exhilarating sport than fighting the walrus. In tiger-hunting you kill your prey—if he does not kill you first—and that ends it. In walrus-hunting, you kill your prey and then your trouble begins. It is easy enough to shoot your first walrus. He will lie on an ice-cake, along with his companions, and allow you to come within a hundred feet if you approach gently in a small boat.

Then, raising his superb head until it offers the best possible target for your bullets, he will regard you in silence, and you can plant a shot in his vulnerable neck offhand. Then there will be flops on many neighboring icefloes, and splashes in the water, and loud, hoarse barkings will ring out, and in a moment you will see something that will make your heart jump, even though you be experienced in danger.

In all hunting, you will not see a more terrible nor a more magnificent bit of action than the charge of a herd of walrus.

When one of their friends is wounded, they collect in groups of twenty or thirty.

Their large circular eyes, bright-red in the sunlight, glare with hatred; their long white tusks gleam fiercely, and, lifting their great heads high out of the water, dashing the foam away from their breasts with their motion, they rush upon you in a mass. If one gets his tusks over the gunwale of your boat, your life is worth exceedingly little. A walrus weighs nearly a ton, and he is strong in proportion. He may either tip your boat over or punch a hole through it with his tusks; in either case, you would fall into water so cold that you would not be able to survive five minutes, even if the walrus did not attack you.

Flight from the charge is impossible; the walrus can rush through the water much faster than you can row. Your only safe course is to shoot the leaders of the herd. Then the rest are encumbered by the helpless bodies of their comrades lying upon the water; the charge is broken; the walrus becomes confused and frightened.

There is a mass of heads wildly bobbing up for a moment, and then they halt, turn with one accord, and flee.

This is their method of fighting when they are assembled

in numbers. When only two or three are gathered together they lack the confidence for a charge, but they pursue tactics that are just as exciting to those against whom their ire is kindled. They lift up their heads afar off, and gage the distance between themselves and your boat. Then they dive, with much ungraceful exhibition of a black back and a flapping of broad hind flippers. The interval during which they are under water is not pleasant for you. Fortunately, they do not often calculate their distance perfectly. Usually a great black head appears ten to fifteen feet away from you.

And you must be quite ready to shoot it with great promptness, or it will disappear again, and in a moment you will feel a scraping upon the bottom of your boat, and it will begin to rise bodily out of the water.

It is said that in Siam apes are in great request among the Siamese merchants in their country houses. Vast quantities of base coin has obtained circulation, and the faculty of discrimination between good money and bad would appear to be possessed by these gifted monkeys in such an extraordinary degree of development that no human being, however carefully trained, can compete with them. The cashier ape meditatively puts into his mouth each coin presented to him in business payments, and tests it with great deliberation. If it be genuine he hands it over to his master; if it be counterfeit, he sets it down on the counter before him with a solemn grimace of dissatisfaction. This method of testing is regarded in commercial circles in Siam as infallible, and, as a matter of fact, the decision of the ape is uniformly accepted as final by all parties interested in the transaction.

THE MASTER CRIMINAL.

BY JABEZ BALFOUR.

When Holt, the reformed English crook, had once started on the subject of bank burglaries he made his revelations with extraordinary zest.

Like all the fraternity, Holt was vain, and inordinately proud of his exploits. I fancy that at the time this weakness and an absolute indifference to truth led him to exaggerate. I had no means at hand of testing his accuracy, so that I had to take his word for everything he confided to me. I had, of course, no opportunity whatever of making notes on paper, and I have to rely entirely on a fairly retentive memory. Doubtless Holt's revelations are, in the main, correct, but it is quite possible that discrepancies may exist. For these discrepancies I, of course, am not responsible. I am not relating this remarkable event of my own knowledge. I am relating what Holt told me.

"For a long time I had not seen Shinburn," said Holt. "He was a lover of art, and it occurred to me that as he was a pretty regular visitor at Christie's auction-room, I might run against him there; and so I did. He knew at once that I had something to say, and he spoke to me in a patronizing way.

"'I can't stay to the end of the sale, Smythson,' said he; 'but I want lot 106. What do you think it'll fetch?'

"Then in a low tone he added:

"'A Scotland Yard man is here, but we needn't mind him so long as you keep up the game. What's amiss?'

"I told him I had discovered I was being shadowed. Then he said:

"'You'd better clear out of London. Go to Sheffield. I've got a notion of working a country bank. Stay at the old place in Pargate. I'll come there.'

"Of course I had to keep up my character as a tout, and stay until lot 106 was put up. Shinburn threaded his way toward the door. To my dismay I saw the detective stop him, and the two exchange a few words, the officer casting his eyes in my direction. Shinburn then quitted the auction-room, leaving me decidedly uneasy.

"It was only after Shinburn called on me at Sheffield that I learned what had taken place between him and the detective. The latter had thought it his duty to warn Shinburn that I was a suspected character, and actually asked him whether everything in his pockets was safe.

"The plan he had formed involved making the acquaintance of responsible bank officials. This would be almost an impossibility in London, but in a country town quite feasible. After much deliberation, we determined to experiment at a north country town—Humberstone, let us call it.

"It was October when we took up our residence, and March in the following year when we brought the thing off, so you see we didn't hurry. Shinburn made himself up as a pleasant elderly gentleman with silvery hair. His game was to make himself acquainted with the internal management of the bank, the routine of business and duties, and especially who kept the keys of the safe; my duty was to shadow continually the leading officials, find out their habits and tastes.

"Shinburn, who passed under the name of Vernon, paid in $2,500, and as a customer hadn't the slightest difficulty in becoming friendly with the manager, his son, and the cashier, he soon discovered that the second was frequently entrusted with certain of the bank keys. The precautions were ample enough in all conscience, for there was within the strong room a bullion safe, the keys of which were carried by the chief cashier. The precise situation of the strong room and the bullion safe, however, had yet to be ascertained.

"Meanwhile I had shadowed the son of the manager, and had discovered that he was not averse to an occasional game of billiards.

"It was only to be expected when one day the youngster went to his favorite hotel that he should find there the affable foreign customer of the bank, Mr. Vernon, and two friends. One, I need scarcely say, was myself, and the other was a man whom I will call Jackson.

"We were soon on very friendly terms. Winter was approaching, and the weather being very cold we began to preach the virtues of Turkish baths, which, we asserted, were really necessary in the winter-time to keep the skin in a healthy action. Shinburn by this time was so closely associated with the young fellow that he went about with him a good deal, and eventually took him to a neighboring town, where there was a Turkish bath.

"I joined them in this excursion, and we all three pat-

ronized the baths. On the plea that my heart was weak I shortened the operation, and, while Shinburn and his companion were in the hot room, I was busy in the outer saloon running over the young man's pockets.

"But we drew a blank. No key was found.

"What was to be done? To repeat the Turkish bath dodge might excite suspicion, and we had to think out some other plan. The young man's taste for billiards gave us a hint.

"An engagement for a friendly match was soon made, and at a wink from Shinburn I hurried off to the billiard-room, and under the pretext of the bitter weather I piled the coals on the fire. By the time the players arrived the room was so hot that Shinburn complained of the heat, and threw off his coat, an example soon followed by his antagonist.

"I waited till the game was well on, and watching my opportunity while the owner had his back turned, and the marker was out of the room, I dashed my hand into the pocket, and drew out the keys. In less than no time I had an impression of every one in wax, Shinburn keeping the young fellow's attention occupied the while.

"Duplicates from these wax impressions were made, and so far we had reason to congratulate ourselves on our success; but the most important key—that of the bullion safe, in the possession of the head cashier—had yet to be obtained. This promised to be rather a difficult matter. Shinburn had exercised his blandishments on Mr. Daly, the head cashier, and the two were very friendly. The cashier lived in a large house with several spare rooms in it, and Shinburn suggested that if it were practicable he would much like to take these rooms, but the idea did not commend itself to Mr. Daly, or, rather, his wife, and Shinburn had to think of some other plan.

"Meanwhile he utilized this friendship to find out the internal arrangements of the bank. One morning he called at the bank before the hours of business, and in his innocent way begged the cashier to oblige him by cashing a check. The money, he said, was for a dear old friend who was departing for London at once. Mr. Daly good-naturedly consented, and opened the door of the strong room.

"'How cold it is! My fingers are frozen,' he exclaimed. 'Is one permitted to warm his hands at your fire?'

"'Why, certainly,' said the cashier laughingly.

"The fire was behind the counter, where, of course, the public were never admitted. But with such a nice, harmless old gentleman an exception might be made. So Mr. Vernon walked round to the fire and saw all he wanted to see.

"But the key of the bullion safe was still out of his reach, and Shinburn and I had several consultations how to solve the difficulty.

"'Daly doesn't play billiards, so that game's off,' said he. 'I've a mind to try the Turkish bath notion again. I know he never parts with the key of the safe, so that if we could talk him into the bath business, the job's bound to come off all right.'

"I never thought Shinburn would succeed, but he did, and one morning the three of us visited the baths where we had failed with the manager's son. Shinburn was very crafty. To throw the cashier off his guard entirely, he suggested that he should deposit his valuables at the ticket bureau, knowing full well he would retain the precious key; and he was right.

"As before, I was quicker than my companions, and while the cashier was being shampooed—a suggestion of Shinburn's to prolong the time—I did the trick with the key.

"Everything was now in readiness, and within a week Shinburn had closed his account at the bank, made an affectionate farewell to our friends at Humberstone, and departed for London. Here we lay low for nearly three months, so that the pleasant Mr. Vernon might be forgotten. Then one March day we returned to Humberstone, this time in our own characters. Vernon had disappeared, and Shinburn was himself again.

"At half-past ten one night, when the streets were beginning to be deserted, Shinburn and I slipped into the bank premises unobserved, leaving Jackson to keep guard outside. The keys worked perfectly, and in less than five minutes we had the bullion safe opened and the contents transferred to a black bag. Besides gold and notes, there was something like $3,000 worth of silver. This was far too bulky for us to burden ourselves with, and we left it behind, carrying off the balance, amounting to about $33,000.

"On leaving the bank, we had a turn of ill-luck. A man saw Jackson hanging about, and noticed him sufficiently to carry his face in his memory, without, however, at the time suspecting his business. He even saw us come out of the bank with the bag, and thought nothing of it. We were too experienced to be in a flurry, and Shinburn, after closing the door, even stopped, although every second was of importance, to light a cigar.

"We caught the 11:25 up-train, and arrived in London at a quarter past seven the next morning.

"Three months went over, and quite by accident I met Jackson in a little French restaurant in Old Compton Street. He looked very ill. He had been on the racket with his share of the spoil, and of late had been terribly worried, for he had got to know that the police were on his track.

"'Do you remember my having a letter while we were staying at the Humberstone Hotel?' said he.

"'Yes. We were in the billiard-room, and the marker brought it to you. It had been opened by mistake by the manageress, whose name happened to be the same as yours. But you said it wouldn't tell her anything.'

"'And it didn't—at the time. She put two and two together afterward, and that's what helped the cops.'

"This was an unpleasant piece of news, as, if Jackson were run to earth, he might give me away. Shinburn was safe, unless I chose to split, for Jackson was ignorant of the identity of Vernon.

"After our little dinner was over we went out. At that moment a man ran across the road, and simultaneously others approached us right and left. We were surrounded by detectives.

"What became of Jackson I didn't know at the time. He was in such a weak state of health that he hadn't any fight in him. I was not disposed to be captured, and I knocked the man who tried to seize me clean off his feet. Then I shouted in French that I was a political refugee, and called for help. Soho is always swarming with foreigners, and half a dozen rushed to my assistance. The ruse was my salvation.

"I got safely away, and the police never got hold of me. Jackson, however, either then or later, was caught, found guilty, and senteneced to ten years. He was staunch, however, and never a word did he let out concerning his pals."

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